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ABSTRACT

This report examines what has happened since 1985 with four statewide Minnesota public school choice laws. These include open enrollment, postsecondary enrollment options, second chance options, and charter public schools. Data collected over 2 years via interviews with and surveys of key stakeholders, including students at postsecondary institutions, indicated that the number of students participating in Minnesota's statewide public school choice options increased substantially from 1985 to 2001-2002. The greatest growth occurred in alternative schools serving students who were not succeeding in traditional secondary schools. While second chance programs served the most students, they were possibly the least examined of the options. Many stakeholders agreed that public school choice options were now widely accepted and generally had beneficial effects. Some schools and districts had changed, at least in part, due to the effects of choice programs. Participants in choice programs expressed great satisfaction. The report notes that several modifications are urgently needed, and if they are not made, state money will not be spent effectively and students will suffer. It recommends that Minnesota retain, strengthen, and improve choice options. Four appendices present stakeholder interview methodology, survey methodology, and summary tables for student surveys. (Contains 46 references.) (SM)

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WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

Minnesota's experience with statewide public school choice programs

by

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May, 2002

A Study by the
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Executive Summary

This report examines what has happened since 1985 with four statewide Minnesota public school choice laws. These include open enrollment, Post-Secondary Enrollment Options, Second Chance options, and charter public schools. This two-year study reached the following major findings, conclusions and recommendations

Findings:

- The number of students participating in Minnesota's statewide public school options has increased substantially, to more than 150,000 students in 2001-2002. During the period from 1988-89 through 2000-01, the proportion of students participating in a statewide public school choice program during a school year increased from about 1% to 17%. In 2000-01, 30% of secondary students participated in one of the four statewide options.
- The greatest growth, from about 4,000 students in 1991, to more than 100,000 students in 2002, occurred in alternative schools serving students who are not succeeding in traditional secondary schools. Neither advocates nor critics of school choice anticipated this increase.
- While "Second Chance" choice programs serve the greatest number of students, they probably are the least examined of the options.
- Most stakeholders agree that public school choice options are now widely accepted and generally have had beneficial effects.
- Some district schools and districts have changed, at least in part, because of the effects of choice options.
- When asked, participants in choice options express a very high degree of satisfaction.
- Preliminary studies suggest positive academic outcomes for students involved in public school choice options, but more research is needed.
- Most of the negative predictions initially made by major education groups about the impact of statewide public school choice options have not been born out.

Conclusions:

- Minnesota's public school choice plans have produced many benefits for participating students, as well as for the overall public education system
- However, several modifications are needed urgently. Some do not involve spending more money. If certain changes are not made, state money won't be spent effectively and students will suffer.
- Continued state leadership – the kind of courageous leadership that helped produce these laws – is now needed to modify and improve them.

Recommendations

1. Minnesota should retain, strengthen and improve our choice options.
2. State action is needed to
    - Provide more information to families
    - Improve supervision and examine procedures regarding alternative schools
    - Continue to refine procedures for charter sponsorship and oversight
    - Examine equity of funding among public school options
    - Promote more information exchange among schools

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This report would not have been possible without the expertise of many people. However, all errors are the responsibility of the authors.

We welcome readers' reactions, suggestions and comments. Please contact the authors at the Center for School Change, 234 Humphrey Center, 301 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455. Phone: 612-626-1834. Email:csc@hhh.umn.edu. Web: www.centerforschoolchange.org.

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Introduction

What has happened since 1985, when Minnesota passed its first public school choice legislation? How accurate were the predictions of advocates and opponents? What evidence exists? Given the information available, what changes or modifications should be considered? This report sets out to help answer these questions.

Although limited research has been conducted on individual choice programs, the research reported here appears to be the first effort to carefully examine all of Minnesota's statewide public school choice programs. It's also the first attempt to review predictions about school choice programs and assess their accuracy.

As the state that has pioneered public school choice measures, Minnesota now has the longest experience with a variety of these initiatives. Like all significant changes in public education, these measures have elicited not only high expectations, but extensive controversy, skepticism, and predictions of dire consequences. Now, after most of Minnesota's public school choice measures have been around for more than ten years, and after alternative schools have been a part of Minnesota education for nearly thirty years, it is appropriate to assess how these school choice measures have worked out in practice. What beneficial or negative effects have they produced for education in Minnesota, and how do these effects square with the high expectations and the dire predictions made at the outset?

Through conducting new research, compiling and summarizing existing research, and interviewing dozens of people representing relevant stakeholder groups, we have tried to compile a clear, comprehensive account of what we know about how Minnesota's four public school choice programs - which consist of Post-secondary Enrollment Options, open enrollment, alternative "second chance" programs, and charter schools - have affected education in the state.

In an attempt to fully capture what is already known about school choice programs in Minnesota, we conducted a typical review of the literature, utilizing the ERIC (Education Resource Information Clearinghouse) database and other Internet resources. In addition, we contacted the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, and College of Education Deans throughout the region to find out if they were aware of any doctoral thesis or other piece of research that examined some aspect of public school choice in Minnesota. With the resources available to the project, we also attempted to update survey data or fill in gaps in knowledge. Two new surveys were conducted as part of this effort, the results of which are relayed in this report.

To assess how the various relevant stakeholder groups in Minnesota now view the four school choice options, fifty individuals associated with a range of organizations and stakeholder groups were interviewed. These interviews were conducted by the senior author between May 2000 and May 2002, and some participants were contacted multiple times. Among the key groups represented were the State School Boards Association; the state school administrator organizations; the state teachers association; the state's rural education association; key legislators; key personnel in the state education department, including several former commissioners of education; administrators in the Minneapolis and St. Paul school systems; the state association of charter schools; charter school administrators; and

education reform activists. The list of those interviewed is provided in Appendix A.

The interviews generally lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour, during which time respondents were asked, in succession about each of the four choice options, to comment on what they saw as (1) any positive and negative effects of each option, (2) any problems or issues that had arisen, (3) any change in opinion about the options over time, and (4) how school districts had responded to the options. Respondents were asked to give examples and point to evidence of any positive or negative effects they identified. Appendix A also includes the list of questions used for the interviews.

We learned some surprising things and attempt to share them here. Not all the information and evidence is on one side of the argument for or against statewide school choice programs. Our fundamental goal was to provide accurate, fair information to help Minnesotans and those in other states understand what has happened in Minnesota, and what might happen in other states and communities that adopt similar legislation. Most of what is presented here is statistical data, but it is important to remember that behind these numbers are students, families and educators. So, along with the data, we present brief stories of people involved in Minnesota's various school choice programs.

We begin with a brief review of Minnesota's public school choice legislation. The following information is summarized in Table 1.

1985: The Minnesota Legislature adopts *Post-Secondary Enrollment Options*. This law allowed high school juniors and seniors to attend colleges or universities, full or part-time, with tax funds following them from school districts to pay for tuition, books and lab fees. Colleges and universities retained the right to decide which students they would admit. The Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) plan was part of a broader public school choice proposal made in 1985 by Governor Rudy Perpich, but was the only choice proposal adopted in 1985 by the legislature.

1987: *Area Learning Centers* and *High School Graduation Incentives* laws are passed. The 1987 Legislature adopted two similar but not identical laws expanding options for secondary students (grades 7-12) with whom traditional schools were not succeeding. These new laws allowed students meeting certain criteria to attend public or private non-sectarian schools created for them. Private non-sectarian schools, or "contract schools," would be available to students only if a public school district agreed to contract with these schools.

1988: The *Open Enrollment* program becomes law. The legislature adopted an open enrollment law that was phased in, permitting K-12 students in large districts to move to schools across district lines. Under the law, students could move without permission from their district of residence if they applied by January 15 for the following school year, if their transfer did not have a negative impact on desegregation efforts, and if the receiving district had room. The law applied to students in all Minnesota districts, regardless of size, beginning in the 1990-91 school year.

1991: Minnesota becomes the first state to pass a *charter school law*. The state allowed groups of parents, educators and community members to create new public schools independent of most (but not all) state regulations, and independent of local labor management agreements, so

long as they would be responsible for improving student achievement. These schools were required to participate in statewide testing programs, had to be non-sectarian, and were not allowed to use admissions tests. The number of charter schools was limited to 8 in the original legislation. Subsequent revisions permitted more schools, and ultimately the cap on schools was removed entirely. The law dictates that charter schools must have a sponsor, which is an organization responsible for approving and monitoring a school's performance contract. The original legislation permitted only local school districts to serve as sponsors. Legislation was eventually changed to permit other organizations, including universities, intermediate school districts, and social service agencies with at least $2 million in the bank, to serve as sponsors. Legislation also was amended to provide "lease aid" to charter schools, as well as to provide state startup funds.

All of these programs were "designed to increase the educational options available to students and place enrollment decisions directly in the hands of students and their parents." (Colopy & Tarr, 1994). Based on our review of the research, interviews with stakeholders, and on the results of the two new surveys, six overall themes emerged. This report is organized around these themes:

- The number of students participating in Minnesota's public school choice options has increased substantially.
- Most stakeholders agree that Minnesota's school choice options are now widely accepted and have generally had beneficial effects.
- Some district public schools and districts have changed, at least in part, as a result of public school choice options.
- When asked, participants involved in choice options express a high degree of satisfaction.
- Preliminary studies in Minnesota suggest positive academic outcomes for students involved in choice options, but more systematic research is needed.
- The consequences for the public school system, as a result of school choice initiatives, do not match most of the early negative predictions made by many educational organizations.

Under each theme, the available research is summarized for each of the four major choice programs:

- Open Enrollment
- Post-secondary Enrollment Options
- Second Chance Laws (including both public and private alternative schools as well as Area Learning Centers)
- Charter Schools

The report concludes with several conclusions and recommendations. The appendix includes a list of those interviewed representing stakeholder groups, a section on the methodology used for the surveys and the literature review and detailed tables with the full results of the surveys.

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Table 1: Minnesota's School Choice Options

Name	Date Enacted	Eligibility	Description
Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)	1985	Academically eligible high school juniors and seniors	The PSEO program allows students the choice to enroll in college courses and earn college credits prior to graduation. Courses can be taken on college campuses or at high school sites. In the case of on-campus courses, proportionate state funding follows the student to the post-secondary institution. Funding for courses offered at a high school site are agreed to by the district and the post-secondary institution involved.
Open Enrollment	1987-88 voluntary 1990-91 mandatory for all districts	All students K-12	Students may apply to enroll in any public school located outside their resident district. Applications to enroll in a non-resident district may be denied only if space is unavailable.
High School Graduation Incentives Program (HSGI) (sometimes referred to as a "second chance" law)	1987	Students who are "at risk" of dropping out of high school	Through HSGI, eligible students may, by their own choice, transfer to schools or programs that meet their particular educational and/or social needs. Their choices include: another regular high school, public or private non-sectarian alternative programs, a college or technical institute under PSEO or an ALC.
Area Learning Centers (ALC) (also known as a "second chance" law)	1987	"At-risk" students and residents over 21 years old who have not received a high school diploma	Area Learning Centers are spread over the state and offer individualized programs focusing on academics and workforce preparation. These centers offer "year-round, flexible programming, tailored instruction, training and work experience opportunities."
Charter schools	1991	K-12 students	Allows for the creation of independent schools that operate under a contract with a sponsor to accomplish certain outcomes or be shut down. Such schools are exempt from regulations relating to their educational programs, but they must follow most health, safety and financial regulations required of all public schools. The state's average per pupil funding follows the student to the school. Funding is also provided to cover a portion of facility leasing costs ("lease aid"), since charter schools do not have the ability to levy taxes for school construction. Funds also provide help with school start-up costs.

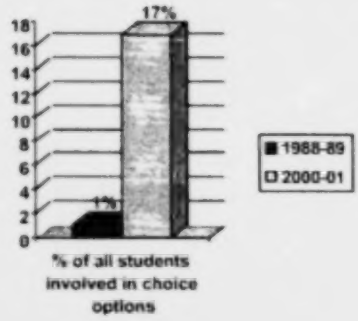
Source: "Minnesota's Public School Choice Options" Policy Study Associates, Inc. for the US Department of Education; research by the Center for School Change.

Theme One:

The number of students participating in Minnesota's public school choice options has increased substantially

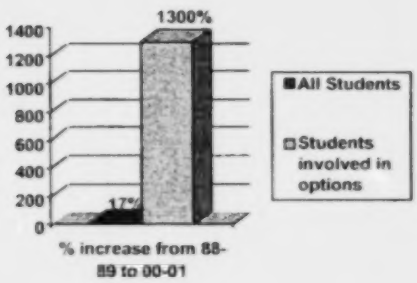
One thing is clear. Open enrollment, the second chance laws, post-secondary enrollment options (PSEO), and charter schools have given Minnesota students and their parents increased opportunities to choose a school best suited to a student's needs. Hundreds of thousands of students have used these programs since their inception. Students of all income groups, ability levels, ethnicities, and regions of Minnesota have made use of one or more of these options, and the number of students involved with these programs has increased (for some programs dramatically) over time. In some cases, such as that of PSEO, involvement has doubled. In the case of alternative schools and Area Learning Centers, use has increased exponentially from around 4,000 to over 100,000. The proportion of Minnesota students that are involved in legislatively created statewide public school choice programs in any given year has increased from 1% in 1988-89 to around 17% in 2000-01, mostly due to the large increase in alternative school usage. The total number of students participating in the four statewide public school options for the 2000-01 school year was 143,651.

Figure 1: Proportion of all students who are involved in a statewide public school option



During this thirteen-year period, the use of public school choice options has increased 1300% compared to an increase in overall state enrollment of approximately 17% (state enrollment grew from 726,950 students in 1988-89 to 851,382 in 2000-01). (Dept. of Children, Families & Learning website, http://cfl.state.mn.us) This 17% figure does not include thousands of students participating in district-run choice programs, such as magnet schools, theme schools, schools-within-schools and other locally offered public options. We deal with this issue in the Theme Three section of this report.

Figure 2: The percentage increase in all students statewide and the percentage increase in students using one of the four statewide public school choice options



Open Enrollment

Since passage of the law in 1987, the number of students attending school in a non-resident district through open enrollment has steadily increased, from 140 in 1988 to over 28,077 in 2001. Early increases were due in part to a phased-in implementation process that began with voluntary school district participation, then became required for school districts with more than 1,000 students, and finally involved all school districts by 1991. However, as Table 2 shows, student participation has more than quadrupled since the program expanded to involve all districts in 1990-91.

Research conducted early in the open enrollment program's existence (1992) indicated that over 90% of the participating students switched to a contiguous district under the program. (Rubenstein, et. al. 1992) While participation is restricted to some extent by geographic considerations, a 1991 Minnesota House Research study found that "Most open enrollment students chose districts 'as healthy' or 'healthier' than their own district." Characteristics such as staffing (pupil/teacher ratios, teacher training and experience index), spending, depth and breadth and overall strength of curriculum, and facilities were used to place districts on a health continuum. (House Research, 1991)

The same study found that "most students used open enrollment to optimize the curriculum available to them." A 1992 US Department of Education study also supports this finding. The majority of both minority and white parents surveyed for the study indicated that academic quality of the school was the most important reason for participating in open enrollment. (Rubenstein, et. al. 1992)

Table 2: Open Enrollment Participation, 1988-2000

Fiscal Year	Total Number of Students Participating
1988	140
1989	350
1990	3,200
1991	5,940
1992	9,884
1993	13,313
1994	16,356
1995	18,956
1996	18,916
1997	19,936
1998	21,842
1999	24,165
2000	26,202
2001	28,077

Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning 6/2001

Researchers also concluded that "Open enrollment appears to give students the flexibility to choose the school environment best suited to their needs." Amy Schmidt and Sheila Korby did just that – chose, under open enrollment, to switch to a school environment in a nearby district. They both had poor attendance records. Like many students, they didn't like school and were bored with their

classes, so they stayed away. They needed a change. Sheila said about their new school with a nontraditional program "They care more, and they give you a chance and don't just blow you off." Amy agreed saying "They give you work you actually want to do." (Nathan & Ysseldyke, 1994)

Students like Amy and Sheila choose to enroll in another district for a variety of reasons. The House Research study supports this notion. Patterns of movement showed that students made choices based on a variety of variables, which the authors found supports their assertion that students are using the flexibility afforded under open enrollment to choose an educational situation best suited to their needs. (Minnesota House Research 1991).

Post-Secondary Enrollment Options

When the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options program was first implemented in 1985, 3,528 11th or 12th grade students chose to attend one or more post-secondary courses offered on college campuses under the program. By the 2000-2001 school year, that number had more than doubled, reaching 7,127. In that same year, an additional estimated 9,700 students were involved in courses offered by post-secondary institutions at a high school site ("college in the schools" courses). Of the 7,127 students involved in the on-campus program in 2000, approximately 30% participated full time (taking more than 24 semester or 36 quarter credits per year).

The wide variety of courses offered at the state's colleges and universities have allowed the high school students participating in the program to choose courses not otherwise available to them. Over 60% of the on-campus PSEO students responding to a Center for School Change survey conducted in 2001 said that they participated in the program in order to take courses that are not offered at their high schools.

Participating in PSEO also provides an alternative educational environment within which some students may perform better. Paul was one of these students. He wrote, "If I hadn't had the opportunity to enroll in Post-secondary Enrollment Options, I would certainly not have become an honors student, much less a college student. High school was just holding me back. I was into trouble in grade school; my junior high performance was poor. But when I found out about this program, I decided to go for it...Here at the University I have yet to get a C. All my grades are A's or B's. I never used to get an A or a B. This program was the saving grace for me and changed my life around." (Nathan & Ysseldyke, 1994)

Students responding to the survey also gave other reasons for participating. For example, 68% of respondents said they were involved with the program because it offered a more adult environment and 72% because they had more freedom. In addition to their academic reasons, many students (80%) cited cost savings as a reason for participating in the program.

Of course not all students in the program excel. A few of the stakeholders interviewed worried that some students who elect the PSEO

program may not be ready for the freedom it entails and may either flounder or waste their time. In the spring of 1986, during the school year following adoption of the Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) legislation, Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) lobbyists noted that a few high school students were not going to graduate on time that spring because they had failed one or more college courses. The lobbyists felt that some students did not understand that failing these courses could mean the students did not have enough credits to graduate. While the MSBA had strongly opposed the PSEO legislation when it was proposed, advocates of PSEO agreed with MSBA's suggestion about how to proceed in this situation. MSBA suggested that in the future, all PSEO students must sign a statement saying they understood that if they failed one or more college courses, they might not graduate on time. This suggestion was adopted, with support from PSEO advocates, in legislation adopted by the 1986 legislature.

Table 3: Participation in the Post-secondary Enrollment Program, 1985-2001

Year	Participants in courses offered on campus	On campus, full-time participants	Participants in post secondary courses offered at the high school site *
1985-86	3,528	468	
1986-87	4,053	684	
1987-88	5,041	682	
1988-89	5,901	884	
1989-90	5,894	881	
1990-91	6,691	1,004	
1991-92	7,534	1,234	1,200
1992-93	5,443	1,249	3,300
1993-94	6,233	1,536	4,400
1994-95	6,668	1,686	5,000
1995-96	6,385	1,734	5,600
1996-97	6,552	1,843	7,500
1997-98	6,997	2,113	8,500
1998-99	7,115	2,097	9,000
1999-00	7,149	2,115	9,500
2000-01	7,127	2,190	9,700

Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning 6/2001
* CFL does not collect data on the numbers of students participating in these courses. These numbers are recorded by school districts and post-secondary institutions. These numbers are estimates made by CFL.

Charter Schools

The number of charter schools has risen steadily since Minnesota's (and the nation's) first charter school, City Academy, opened its doors in 1991. As of February 2002, there were 68 charter schools operating in Minnesota. Collectively, these schools have an enrollment of 10,206 students. (Department of Children, Families and Learning web site, http://cfl.state.mn.us) Charter schools are spread throughout the state, and as Table 4 shows, students in these schools are disproportionately students of color, low-income, special needs and non-English speakers.

Many charter schools are designed to address the needs of students who are not being well served in traditional schools – students like Sim Franco. Sim is "proud to be a success story of one of Minnesota's first charter schools. I was on drugs. I abused alcohol. But Milo [his charter school teacher] said it was up to me. Did I want to learn? Would I come to school every day? I proved it to her. I came every day. I taught an art class. I was on a committee. I did what I knew was right." He went on to attend St. Paul Technical College. (Nathan & Ysseldyke, 1994) Sim is one of the 90 to 95% of this charter school's students, most of whom have dropped out of the conventional system, that go on to post-secondary education. (Cutter, 2002)

Many charters offer educational approaches not available in the traditional schools in a given geographic area. A 1994 survey of charter school parents conducted by the Minnesota House of Representatives Research Department found that a charter school's curriculum was the "primary attraction" for parents. Most charter schools are small (under 400 students), have small class sizes, and have a lower than average ratio of students to teachers. The same House of Representatives study found these features to be attractive to parents as well. (Minnesota House Research, 1994)

A 1998 University of Minnesota study that was focused on choice options and students with disabilities found that the top reasons students with and without disabilities chose to enroll in a charter school were as follows: class size, staff, and academic programming. As table 4 shows, a higher proportion of charter school students are classified as "special education" than traditional public school students. Although this difference has been decreasing over time, University of Minnesota researchers found that parents of disabled students cited special education services at their charter as one reason for enrolling. (Ysseldyke & Lange, 1998)

Table 4: Public School Student Demographics 2001 - Charter and Non-Charter
(Based on students taking Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments*)

Grade Level	% Free and Reduced Lunch		% Minority Students		% New Students		% Special Education		% LEP Students	
	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter
3rd	63%	30%	61%	18%	43%	10%	11%	11%	19%	6%
5th	52%	28%	46%	17%	37%	9%	19%	13%	8%	6%
8th	41%	24%	28%	15%	36%	8%	20%	12%	3%	4%
10th	45%	20%	35%	15%	73%	8%	18%	11%	4%	4%

Source: 2001 Minnesota Education Year Book: The Status of PreK-12 Education in Minnesota, prepared by the Office of Educational Accountability, University of Minnesota, pages 69-76), Office of Educational Accountability, raw data
* In all cases % enrolled students taking the test is greater than 90%

Table 5: Enrollment in Minnesota Alternative Schools

Year	Area Learning Centers		Alternative Schools		Private Contract Schools		Total	
	Number	FTE (ADMs)	Number	FTE (ADMs)	Number	FTE (ADMs)	Number	FTE (ADMs)
88-89*							4,050	
93-94	31,354	7,492	4,826	1,815	2,695	1,319	38,875	10,625
94-95	35,863	8,750	6,065	1,862	2,647	1,215	44,575	11,826
95-96	43,363	10,567	5,514	1,644	2,596	1,242	51,473	13,454
96-97	49,662	11,889	7,661	2,187	2,860	1,387	60,183	15,463
97-98	67,574	14,300	7,541	2,183	3,063	1,559	78,178	18,042
98-99	76,277	15,551	6,407	1,808	3,811	1,845	86,495	19,194
99-00	79,327	15,534	9,521	2,357	4,157	2,121	93,005	20,012
00-01	88,521	17,797	7,196	1,897	4,399	2,437	100,116	22,131

Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, 2002
* Information provided by Glory Kibbel, Alternative Program Specialist, Department of Children, Families and Learning, 2002

Alternative Learning Centers, Alternative Schools and Private Contract Alternative Schools

Participation in three types of alternative schools has increased dramatically since the 1987 passage of the High School Graduation Incentives and Area Learning Center laws. Indeed, this is by far the choice program with the most significant increase in student participation.

Many students enroll in these programs on a part-time basis -- either for a portion of a school year or for a portion of their day. Table 5 shows the striking increase in both student counts and counts adjusted for part-time involvement (ADMs – Adjusted Daily Membership) in Area Learning Centers, alternative schools and private contract schools. The total number of students involved in alternative programs has increased from 4,050 in 1988-89, shortly after the High School Graduation Incentives and Area Learning Center laws were passed, to over 100,000 in 2000-01.

A variety of theories have been advanced for the large increase in the

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use of these programs. Although no research conducted to date has specifically addressed the issue, clues about the increase can be found in the results of a recent survey of Area Learning Center students. Students surveyed in 2001 by the Center for School Change at five representative Area Learning Centers most often cited the following reasons for enrolling:

- to have a more individualized education
- to be in a school with fewer students
- to be in a less restrictive learning environment, and
- to have a more flexible schedule.

In 1998, the reasons given by students responding to a University of Minnesota study (both with disabilities and without) for enrollment in alternative schools were similar. They most frequently cited student/teacher relationships, school size and climate, and a sense of control over their education (Ysseldyke& Lange, 1998). This study specifically examined the alternative school experience for students with disabilities. Disabled students, more often than other students, cited two reasons for continued ALC enrollment. They said:

- I am not teased or hassled by other students
- I am not being treated differently because of my race, sex or school ability

The same study found "that alternative schools and programs are more willing to accommodate students with special needs through flexible scheduling and by establishing a means of connecting with the students in the areas of goal setting and progress monitoring." (Ysseldyke& Lange, 1998) This might explain why students with disabilities are enrolling in these programs in greater proportions than in traditional schools. In 1998 17% of alternative program students had disabilities compared to 10% in traditional schools. (Ysseldyke& Lange, 1998)

Students enroll in alternative schools for student/teacher relationships, school size and climate and a sense of control over their education

While some students are ordered by either the courts or their home school district to participate in an alternative program, the vast majority of students choose to enroll. Less than 15% of the students surveyed by the Center for School Change stated that they enrolled because "[they] did not have a choice." One student we encountered on a school visit fell into this 15%. The student had been assigned to a school after, as he put it, "I messed up." He acknowledged having academic and behavior problems in his previous school. When asked, he responded that he had not been formally removed by the superintendent and school board – he was simply told he was not welcome at the school and that he was being sent to the alternative school. He made it clear that he did not like the alternative school. He missed his friends and several activities available at the conventional school, and said

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he was not learning much at the alternative school. It was beyond the scope of this report to do an in-depth study of the reasons for his transfer and the process used to transfer him.

However, we urge careful examination of what happens with students who are assigned to alternative schools, rather actively selecting them. For example, do the assigned students, on average, make as much progress as students who select the school? Do the assigned students, on average, create more problems for faculty and students than other young people who choose the alternative? Is there any difference in retention rate? Answers to these and other questions can help provide valuable information for local and state policymakers.

It also appears that research could help provide valuable data about what happens with students who enroll part time in these alternative programs. Has this increased the number of students who graduate? What has been the experience of those who attend an alternative school part-time, and a more conventional school part-time? Again, our research did not focus on these questions, but answering them could provide valuable information for state and local policymakers.

Theme Two:

Most stakeholders agree that Minnesota's school choice options are now widely accepted and have generally had beneficial effects.

The overall finding from the interviews we conducted with stakeholders (which are described in detail in the introduction) was that most stakeholders agree that Minnesota's school choice options are now widely accepted and have generally had beneficial effects. Of course, not all stakeholders saw everything the same way, so some qualifications to this generalization and some dissenting opinions will be discussed when the main issues and problems identified are addressed.

Nearly everyone interviewed acknowledged that Minnesota's choice options are widely accepted by the public, even if some public educators and organizations still dislike or oppose some of the options. In fact, public opinion surveys show support for cross-district public school choice in Minnesota increased from 33% in 1985 to 76% in 1992. (Dornfield, 1985 and Hotakainen, 1992). By 1994, approval for cross-district choice had reached 88%. (Gordon S. Black Corp, 1994)

A number of stakeholders interviewed commented that, if one thinks about what is in the best interests of kids and families, it is hard to object to the valuable opportunities the choice options have created. For example, one school superintendent, who initially opposed the creation of a charter school in his district, said he later became a convert to the idea because:

> I began to see how it could enrich the educational opportunities for children. My philosophy now is to take a broader view of the provision of educational services for the community, not just one limited to what the district itself directly controls.

Fears have been allayed and opinions have changed over time, as the choice initiatives have generally had less dramatic effects on school districts than initially expected by many. A different school superintendent had this to say, in this case about open enrollment:

> People [then] had a monopolistic mentality. They said if you don't like the public schools you can go to a private school. Everybody had a horror story regarding the bad consequences they thought would flow from open enrollment. None of the horror stories happened. Most people want to go to their own school district.

Another school superintendent said this about the post-secondary option:

> The positive effects absolutely outweigh the negative effects. It gave kids the opportunity to accelerate their education. High schools rapidly improved their programs to compete. The number of Advanced

> Placement courses offered exploded.

This superintendent went on to say, about the effects of charter schools, that, "They create competition. I found the faculty in my schools were more open to change because they had received competition."

Other examples of the positive effects of the choice options noted by stakeholders included the following:

- The choice options – particularly the post-secondary and open enrollment options -- have caused districts to become more 'customer-friendly' and to improve their offerings by adding more Advanced Placement offerings, etc. – Stated by many of the stakeholders who were interviewed

- "Districts have improved their offerings to retain students." – Minnesota School Boards Association official

- "The post-secondary option has created more educational choices for students. It has helped the less wealthy to get a start in post-secondary education. Also, it provides an alternative for kids that don't fit-in in their high schools. And it also has promoted collaboration between secondary and post-secondary education." – Representative Alice Seagren

- "Charter schools offer a chance to create learning environments that the regular system has trouble doing. For example, the very high tech Minnesota Business Academy just started. It was easier to get this started outside the regular school system." – Representative Alice Seagren

- The charter school movement is a "vital, valuable part of public education in Minnesota. I'm a strong believer in public schools – including charter schools. I believe that many charters do a fine job of serving families and students. Some are models not only for charter schools, but for public schools operated by districts." – Representative Matt Entenza

- "The alternative schools have been very beneficial." – Minnesota Association of School Administrators official

- "The choice options have benefited inner-city kids." – Stakeholder representing inner-city groups

- "When I began my research on the choice options, I expected negative effects [for special needs children]. Instead, it was all good news for these kids. In fact, it 'blew my mind' how good the results [of participation in choice options] were for kids with disabilities." – Dr. James Ysseldyke, Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota

- "One leading motive for these [special needs] kids to move was that they were being bullied. The choice options gave kids a chance for a fresh start." – Dr. James Ysseldyke, Professor of

Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota

Issues About the Choice Options

Of the four choice options, most interviewees agreed that it is mainly the charter schools that remain somewhat controversial. This is ironic, in a way, because the post-secondary option, open enrollment, and (especially) the alternative, "second chance" programs together serve and affect many more people than do charter schools. Indeed, many respondents viewed the alternative programs as the most dramatic success, because of their rapid growth and the thousands of students they serve. Interestingly, an advocate of the alternative programs gave the students part of the credit for the innovative character of these programs. He remarked that, "I'm thankful for the difficult kids. If we didn't have them, we would never change anything!"

The major exceptions to the otherwise broad acceptance of Minnesota's choice options are the state teachers association, Education Minnesota, and some rural educators. With their worries about declining enrollments and the possible consolidation of rural school districts, rural educators remain wary of charters and other choice options. The Minnesota Education Association and its successor (after the merger of the MEA with the state's American Federation of Teachers affiliate), Education Minnesota, have consistently opposed the school choice options. They have been especially critical of charter schools, but also view the other choice options as problematic and unnecessary. On this point, while charter school teachers may join unions, they are not required to do so. And unlike other Minnesota public school teachers, they are not required to pay dues to a union whether or not they choose to join. These factors may influence teacher union opinions about charters.

Many people, including major funding agencies, believe that some Minnesota charter schools have developed important, replicable innovations.

In fact, Education Minnesota's stance is not something peculiar to Minnesota. Charter schools were a key object of criticism at the national meeting of the American Federation of Teachers in Philadelphia in 2000. (Snyder, 2000) At this meeting, Al Fondy, president of Pittsburgh's AFT affiliate, said, "There is no such thing as a good charter-school law... This really is a vehicle for the enemies of public school education to undermine it." (Snyder, 2000) More recently, a front-page story in Education Week highlighted union opposition to charter schools. (Keller, 2002)

It is important to take the concerns raised by Education Minnesota seriously because they represent the state's teachers and because the issues they raise deserve attention. These issues include the academic achievement of students in charter schools; whether charter schools are

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innovative, as promised; whether charter schools serve minority and special needs children well or increase racial and ethnic segregation; and whether charter schools suffer from dangerously weak management, supervision and accountability.

Sandra Peterson, formerly co-president and now vice-president of Education Minnesota, has been a principal speaker for Education Minnesota over the last several years about school choice and charter schools. She has been quite clear about where she and the organization stand on these matters. In a magazine story about Minnesota's experience with school choice, she is quoted as follows:

> "Peterson says [charter] schools 'create a parallel system,' and she is not convinced of the charter schools success. 'I've yet to see any advantage. [Charter schools] don't do any better than schools generally, and some have done much worse,' she says. (Patterson, 2001, p. 43).

The academic achievement of students in charter schools is an important issue. In a highly contested domain like that of school choice, it is common to see the opposing sides disagree about the interpretation of whatever evidence is available. Their "spin doctors" will disagree about whether the glass is "half-empty or half-full." Compounding the problem, in the case of achievement data for charter schools, the available research evidence is mixed.

So far Minnesota has not implemented annual statewide tests that allow observers to track the same students over three to four years, to monitor student and school improvement. However, Minnesota does have statewide tests for students at 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th grade levels. This allows some comparisons to be made between schools.

Some urban charter schools, such as City Academy and Higher Ground Academy, have done better on statewide tests than not only most other urban public schools, but also some suburban public schools that have lower rates of poverty and populations of students of color. All of the charter schools in Minneapolis, for example, had pass rates equal to or higher than the Minneapolis district on this year's state writing test. Some charters have pioneered new approaches that have helped improve achievement. Techniques these schools have developed may be helpful to other schools.

While some charter schools are showing impressive results on state tests, it is important to remember that according to charter school advocates, the charter idea was never promoted as something that would always produce improved student achievement. It was developed (and adopted), in part as a new form of accountability – that schools not improving student achievement by an agreed upon level would be closed. This has in fact happened. Several Minnesota charter schools that did not improve student achievement have been closed by their sponsors, both local school districts and the state. These actions have been strongly and publicly supported by charter advocates.

In general, it appears that some charters are doing well, and others need moderate to significant improvement. Academic achievement of charter students and among students involved in other options is discussed in more detail in section/Theme Five of this report.

A column Sandra Peterson wrote for the Minnesota Educator discusses additional concerns she has about charter schools: "Very few if any charter schools offer innovative instructional programs. Most offer instructional programs that are available, and frequently used, in public schools. Worse, some of them offer questionable programs." (Peterson, 2000, p. 2) Although charter schools, like schools run by districts, clearly vary in the quality of their programs, many people, including major funding agencies, believe that some Minnesota charter schools have developed important, replicable innovations. A few examples include:

- Minnesota's New Country School, which has received a $4 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to replicate itself. MNCS has received extensive national recognition for its many innovative features, including its imaginative use of technology and highly individualized project-based learning, along with its governance model, which is cooperatively structured and managed by teachers..

- New Visions School in Minneapolis has also received a federal replication grant to work with both charter and conventional schools in several states. This school uses a number of techniques, including mind relaxation and emerging technology, to help students with various disabilities learn more effective ways to control their anger and other negative impulses.

- The Metro Deaf School is a K-8, St. Paul charter that draws students from 29 school districts. It has pioneered the use of American Sign Language in a language immersion school for the deaf and hard of hearing. The school has had a number of visitors, some of whom wish to replicate its approaches.

- Several charter schools, including City Academy, Family Learning Center, Cedar-Riverside, Avalon and New Visions have demonstrated how tax funds can be spent more effectively and services to families and students improved, when schools share space with social service agencies or with other schools.

- Charters such as Cyber Village and Minnesota New Country have made creative use of technology and "on-line" learning. At Cyber Village students experience a unique blend of traditional and technology-based approaches to learning. Students at this charter spend two days on-site and three days learning through interactive web-based applications.

Beyond the questions about academic achievement and whether charter schools are innovative (as they often

were promised to be), another issue Peterson raised in the same column concerned racial and ethnic segregation. She asserted that:

> Equally disturbing, the charter school concept is being used more and more often to resegregate schools along racial, cultural or socioeconomic lines. If this trend continues, many . . . are concerned that we are creating a parallel or even balkanized school system. Do we really want an unlimited number of schools, each with its own ideology? Each causing students to be suspicious of one another? I think not. We don't want it and we certainly can't afford it. I think it's time to apply the brakes [to charters]. (Peterson, 2000, p. 2)

It is right to be concerned and vigilant about the possibility that charter schools might promote, rather than diminish, racial and ethnic segregation. Policy makers and researchers must keep an eye on this possibility. It is true, however, that many charter schools, in Minnesota and elsewhere, are located in urban and inner-city areas where segregation was already a problem or a constraint because of "white flight." A stakeholder representing inner-city groups emphasized when interviewed that the public schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul were highly segregated before the advent of charter schools and that charters had done little to exacerbate this situation. In other words, it is difficult to "resegregate" schools that are already segregated.

A specific worry about segregation that came up in interviews with Education Minnesota officials concerned the advent of charter schools they believed would serve only Hmong children in St. Paul, Minnesota. It is certainly legitimate to have some concerns about this kind of ethnic isolation, particularly for new arrivals to America, but this is a complex issue in today's debates about what are proper and desirable approaches to multiculturalism in our society. St. Paul finds itself in a very unique situation in regard to its mushrooming Hmong population:

> The 150,000 Hmong people living in the United States traveled thousands of difficult miles to get here. Many settled in St. Paul, Minnesota, giving it the largest urban Hmong population in the world. Today these Hmong are wrestling with issues of culture and identity, with maintaining ties to the past and seeking to thrive in modern urban America. (Nyman, 1999)[1]

As a practical matter, if the Hmong are concentrated more in some neighborhoods than others, they will naturally tend to go to neighborhood schools with large percentages of Hmong children. But, beyond this, advocates for disadvantaged minority groups frequently argue that children from these groups need the benefit of special educational settings they can choose (but not be compelled to accept), such as Afro-Centric or Native American charter schools, where

[1] See Joe Nathan's (2002) newspaper column pointing out that Hmong parents are raising important questions about the values represented in public school policy-making and about the lack of responsiveness to their concerns.

cultural identity, self-esteem, and solidarity can be built. A recent study in New Orleans underscores the complexity of the assimilation issues for immigrant children. Researchers found that Vietnamese youth who retained their cultural identity and assimilated more slowly to American culture were more likely to be achievers and less likely to be delinquents than were their counterparts who assimilated quickly. (Rothstein, 2002)

Both representatives of the Hmong community we interviewed agreed that Minnesota's school choice options are beneficial and that the Hmong should be able to use them. One went further, stating that the "Hmong should have every right to go to charter schools or be with their own community if the public schools aren't serving them well." He said that some Hmong parents are unhappy with the public schools, especially because of their lack of representation. There are very few Hmong school administrators and teachers, there is a lack of attention to the Hmong language and culture, and Hmong participation in school P.T.O.'s is difficult because of the language barrier and feeling like unwelcomed "outsiders." He added that the Hmong are very family and community-oriented. He said they desire to stay together and feel they can succeed best in education if they are competing against each other and other immigrant groups in small settings. When they are thrown into large, competitive schools with mixed and predominantly Anglo-Amercian populations he thinks Hmong youth can feel lost in a foreign environment.

Looking at the other side of the coin, it is interesting that one rarely hears white policy makers or union leaders lamenting the extreme racial segregation and cultural and racial isolation common in white suburban schools and school districts. Might not these schools and districts also be building the cultural identity, self-esteem, and solidarity of the white student populations they serve? And, if this is a bad thing, what should be done about it? The answers to these questions are not easy on either side of the coin.

In passing, we should note that charter schools that create special instructional environments intended to foster academic success -- by strengthening the cultural identity, self-esteem, and solidarity of disadvantaged minority groups, such at African-Americans, Native Americans, and the Hmong -- are innovative schools, even if they are innovations some people do not welcome. Also, when judging how innovative charter schools are, it should be remembered that charter schools are primarily an innovation in the governance of public education that facilitates the creation of new schools that may serve diverse purposes. As we note later, the charter school idea has, in fact, won a national award as an innovation in government.

In addition to concerns about charter schools and ethnic minorities, critics of charters have also worried that they may not be serving special needs children well or may be refusing to admit special needs children or ignoring their needs if they are admitted. As noted earlier, Professor

James Ysseldyke of the University of Minnesota found no support for this fear in the extensive research on this topic he conducted on Minnesota's choice options. Indeed, he found that the choice options worked remarkably well for special needs children. This is a very powerful finding because, as a researcher, he began with negative expectations and had them refuted.[2] (For his early concerns, see Ysseldyke, 1993.)

"Hmong should have every right to go to charter schools or be with their own community if the public schools aren't serving them well."

It is important to note that the central occasion and focus for Sandra Peterson's 2000 column on charter schools was a very legitimate concern about the abrupt closing of St. Paul's Success Academy charter school. For her, this was further evidence that the management, supervision, and accountability of Minnesota's charter schools were often dangerously inadequate. A number of stakeholders raised this important issue during the interviews we held, because of the closing of several charter schools as a result of fiscal mismanagement amidst, in some cases, allegations of corruption. Indeed, this matter became a significant political issue in the Minnesota legislature, particularly during 2001, when Representative Matt Entenza and his staff released the results of an inquiry they undertook into this matter (Drew & Lonetree, 2001). When interviewed for this study, Representative Entenza said their audit of 60 charter schools found that most were doing fairly well, but they found irregularities in five and later seven. He said that most charter schools were well run, but a few had been subject to abuse.

Concerns about inadequate oversight and management of charter schools have also been raised in other states and have even received some national attention. (Bowman, 2001; Richard, 2002) In some cases, charter schools are run by idealistic people with little management experience which can lead to problems. In a few cases, unscrupulous individuals have taken advantage of loosely monitored charter schools for their own gain. Recently, policy discussions in a number of states have included some debate and reassessment of how charter schools should be regulated and financed. This has shown that the charter school movement has been going through some growing pains and difficult developmental stages. (Richard, 2002)

When interviewed, several stakeholders noted the following concerns:

- In Minnesota, as elsewhere, there is continuum of charter schools from strong to weak. A few are (or were) very poorly managed.

[2] It should be noted that research on charter schools in other states has sometime found evidence that special needs children were not being well served in some charter schools. The picture seems to be mixed on this issue.

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- There is a need for better oversight and mentoring of them.
- The role and responsibility of sponsors and accountability mechanisms needed attention.
- Some sponsors seemed to provide little or no oversight and guidance. Others, like the College of St. Thomas, took their sponsorship more seriously. Initially, the St. Paul school district provided little oversight of its charter schools but, as a result of the problems they have experienced, the district now takes it role in sponsorship and oversight much more seriously.
- There was agreement among stakeholders that poor management or corruption could hurt the charter movement.

The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools agreed that more scrutiny and oversight of the fiscal management of charter schools was needed and would be helpful. Discussions between the Association and legislators, including Representative Entenza, led to agreement on some measures to add safeguards against the problems of fiscal mismanagement that had occurred. These measures included requirements of greater financial disclosure and provisions against conflict of interest.

In summary, the stakeholders interviewed generally agreed that the choice options have been beneficial and are widely accepted by the public. The most important problems they noted involved the management and oversight of charter schools. These issues now have been addressed by measures adopted by the legislature and by the state education department.

However, some additional work may be needed on oversight of public school options, including but not limited to charters. We will say more about this later in the report.

Theme Three:

Some existing district schools and districts themselves have changed, in part, as a result of options

While in theory, increased choice in education will lead to improvements in the overall public education system, most of the research conducted to date has focused on the impact of choice programs on the students participating first-hand in them. Unfortunately, it is much more difficult to document and analyze the impact Minnesota's choice programs have had on the students remaining in conventional district schools. A few studies have attempted to look at these impacts. They have primarily focused on the effect open enrollment has had on the larger system. Some research examines the impact of the Post-secondary Enrollment Options Act. These studies are summarized below.

One study surveyed both parents of students participating in open enrollment and parents of those that were not participating in the program. One conclusion of this study is "Minnesota parents have a greater degree of 'influence' in their relations with school officials because of open enrollment, and they have more control over the type and scope of educational services received by their children." (Tenbusch, 1993) The study summary explained

> Both participating and nonparticipating parents stated that since open enrollment began, school administrators have been more responsive to their wishes and demands. A substantial number of nonparticipating parents indicated that their resident school principal has been very accommodating in disputes and with suggestions in an effort to 'get students to stay.' The results obtained from the *parent influence scale* indicate that a system-wide increase in 'parent voice' has occurred as a result of open enrollment. All Minnesota parents, regardless of their open enrollment participatory status, race, level of education now enjoy greater authority in asserting their desires regarding educational services. (Tenbusch, 1993)

A related study, conducted by the same researcher, surveyed a random sample of school principals. This study reached the following conclusions based on principals' responses. Open enrollment has:

- Created a market system for educational services;
- Stimulated improvements to school curriculum and support services;
- Promoted greater parent involvement in school planning and decision-making;
- Fostered a more equitable distribution of school resources and student access to educational services; and
- Increased the ethnic and cultural diversity of schools.

(Garet& Tenbusch, 1993)

These studies were conducted early in open enrollment's history. It is unclear whether these impacts have continued over time, since the researchers felt that "there is reason to believe [based on experience in Massachusetts] that the increase in parental influence observed in this study will diminish as school administrators become more experienced with open enrollment." (Garet & Tenbusch, 1993) However, it was the perception of many of the stakeholders interviewed that choice programs continue to give parents and students more power and control in the overall public school system.

A 1995 study looked specifically at the impact of open enrollment and the PSEO program on rural school districts. This study generally concluded that "the specific influence of EO and PSEO programs on organizational and curricular changes is in many cases difficult to ascertain" because concerns over the threat of consolidation cloud the issue. Still, the researcher reported:

> Yet the attention to plans in which districts share teachers and courses did reflect responses to a perceived competitive situation, as was attention to the preservation of academic curricula, the consideration of interactive television and the development of new courses. (Nasstrom, 1995)

Another section of this study summary stated that:

> Even among administrators whose districts did not gain a significant number of students under OE [Open Enrollment], some positive views emerged. Three suggested that in the future more aggressive tactics to gain and retain students would have to be employed. Four administrators initiated changes in curricular offerings. Sometimes changes seemed questionable... Still, the changes appeared to meet the desires of some students and parents. Several administrators gave further attention in the pairing and sharing agreements... These opportunities had already been in existence, but open enrollment, sometimes in conjunction with PSEO, gave strong impetus to an increase in their use. (Nasstrom, 1995)

Along similar lines, a 1991 Minnesota House research study concluded that "Open enrollment continues to give students the opportunity to 'vote with their feet' in response to school board decisions." This study went on to provide three examples of rural school districts where "open enrollment gave students a very direct way to influence board decisions about where students should attend school." This study stated "Increasingly, school boards of small districts making difficult decisions about where to send students using cooperation and consolidation must factor students' use of open enrollment into the boards' decision-making." (Minnesota House Research, 1991)

As Table 6 shows, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students taking Advanced Placement exams and a steady increase in the number of exams each student is taking. While data on the number of Advanced Placement courses offered is not directly available, the large increase in exams being taken suggests that the number of courses offered has also increased

dramatically. Students take separate exams for each course. Many stakeholders interviewed for this report attributed increases in the number of Advanced Placement courses to the competition provided by the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options program. Data on the number of students involved in "college in the schools" programs presented earlier also shows a steady increase from approximately 1,200 in 1991 to 9,700 in 2001.

Table 6: Number of students sitting for Advanced Placement exams and the number of exams these students have taken for selected years in Minnesota

Year	Number of Students	Number of Exams Taken
1986	297	374
1990	3,107	4,057
1995	7,278	9,401
1998	11,041	16,151
2001	14,839	23,015

Source: The College Board

The PSEO program also appears to have had an impact on the relationship between school districts and post-secondary institutions. In a poll conducted by the legislative auditor, 52% of principals thought the program had increased cooperative efforts with post-secondary institutions (compared with 15% who thought the program had decreased cooperation). (Office of Legislative Auditor, p. 108)

The number of options offered by local districts has increased steadily since 1985. It is impossible to say that this is solely because of the statewide public school laws, but some officials of statewide education groups and other educators agreed that this was one impact of Minnesota's choice legislation.

As noted earlier, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students served by alternative schools. But school districts have also expanded options that serve a broad cross section of students. A 1993 report found that the number of local district option programs such as magnets, options and schools-within-schools increased steadily from 1985-86 to 1992-93. (Malone, Nathan and Sedio) For example, the number of such suburban and rural options increased from 49 in 1985-86 to 119 in 1992-93. The number of such options in Minneapolis and St. Paul increased from 59 (in 1985-86) to 151 in 1992-93.

The same 1993 report found that more than 67,000 students were participating in these programs. (Malone, Nathan and Sedio) This number included students actively selecting schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul (about 62,000 students). Since 1993, the number of students in these districts has grown, as has the number of options provided. So the 62,000 figure is, if anything, low.

The 1993 figure also included just over 5,000 students actively selecting an option in a suburban or rural district. Over the last fifteen years, a number of these school districts have created stand-alone and school-within-school options for students and families, including districts such as Alexandria, Bagley, Brainerd, Buffalo, Cyrus, Cambridge-Isanti, Duluth,

Faribault, Forest Lake, Heron Lake-Okabena, International Falls, Little Falls, Mankato, Parham, Rochester, Roseville, and St. Cloud.

Indeed, an untold story about public school choice has been its impact on educational opportunity in rural Minnesota (sometimes known as "Greater Minnesota.") Because open enrollment, Second Chance laws and charter legislation allowed families to move across district lines, educators and parents in dozens of rural communities created schools-within-schools and rural magnets.

The consequences of these changes played out differently around the state. Small towns such as Nerstrand, Lafayette, Emily, North Shore, Cyrus, Randall and Miltona found that they could keep their local elementary school open by attracting students from larger, nearby communities whose families approved of practices such as multi-age classrooms, students staying with the same teacher for 2-3 years, extensive school/community collaboration and an atmosphere which encouraged and welcomed family involvement. Moreover, using some of the same and some different ideas, rural districts all over the state created new schools within-schools to provide options for families right within their existing buildings. Also, educators in some rural communities created distinctive schools, such as year round elementary and middle schools in Cambridge-Isanti, the Minnesota New Country School in LeSueur-Henderson, and Mississippi Horizons in Brainerd.

Because open enrollment, Second Chance laws and charter legislation allowed families to move across district lines, educators and parents in dozens of rural communities created schools within schools and rural magnets.

Fully documenting the impact of public school choice in rural Minnesota is beyond the scope of this study. But we believe that further research could be very valuable. Initially, some rural Minnesotans feared that public school choice would be the end of small schools. In fact, all over the state communities have found that many families left larger schools and districts via open enrollment and charter legislation to enroll their children in smaller, high quality schools.

As of fall 2000, according to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, there were 409,310 students in grades 7-12. More than 124,000 of them were participating in one of Minnesota's statewide public school choice programs. This represents more than 30% of the student body for grades 7-12, suggesting that selecting among various public school options has become a major part of education in Minnesota.

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Theme Four:

When asked, participants involved in options express a high degree of satisfaction

The vast majority of parents and students who have chosen to participate in the choice programs discussed here are satisfied, according to survey responses. Survey data on satisfaction levels is available for the PSEO program and alternative schools and, to a limited extent, for charter schools and the open enrollment program. In this section, these survey results are examined in greater detail.

Open Enrollment

The 1992 US Department of Education survey of parents whose children participated in open enrollment found that "95% said that their child's performance in and *satisfaction with school* had improved or stayed the same." Sixty percent of these parents indicated improved satisfaction, while only 2% felt that the student's satisfaction level had declined as a result of attending a new school under the open enrollment program. Open enrollment students were also queried as part of this study, and their responses were consistent with parent responses. Ninety-five percent of the secondary students involved in the program were either satisfied or very satisfied with their new school. These responses are particularly notable when compared with the "satisfied" or "very satisfied" rating of only 49% that students provided for their previous schools. Only 7% said that they would not remain at their new school. (Rubenstein, et al., 1992)

Alternative Learning Centers, Alternative Schools and Private Contract Alternative Schools

A recent survey of students in five representative Area Learning Centers supports survey research done in 1990. (Nathan & Jennings, 1990) Both studies found that a majority of students express satisfaction with the alternative school they are attending. In Table 7, results of the 2001 Center for School Change survey data are summarized. The most common response of students at all five schools was "satisfied." Note, however, that responses vary somewhat from school to school.

These students also feel strongly that the teachers at their Area Learning Centers are "better" than those of their previous schools. This perception may be based at least in part on the perception of the same students that ALC teachers are more supportive. A majority of students in four out of the five locations listed supportive teachers as a benefit of ALC enrollment. Table 8 summarizes ALC student attitudes about their teachers. When asked: "How are your teachers at your ALC?" the vast

Table 7: Satisfaction levels for selected area learning centers

Location	Either Very Satisfied or Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	In between	Dissatisfied
Rural 1	67.9%	17.9%	50%	17.9%	10.7%
Rural 2	66.6%	17.6%	49%	29.4%	3.9%
Rural 3	66.6%	22.2%	44.4%	16.7%	9.3%
Suburban 1	97.1%	45.2%	41.9%	12.9%	
Suburban 2	78.2%	33.3%	44.9%	14.1%	3.8%
Urban	72.5%	35%	37.5%	22.5%	

majority rated them better than those at their previous high schools.

A 1990 survey of randomly selected alternative school students found striking increases in student satisfaction with school. "The percentage of students saying they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' [with their school] increased from 22% to 77% among ALC students, from 20% to 78% among alternative school students and from 25% to 75% among private alternative school students. (Nathan & Jennings, 1990)

Post-secondary Enrollment Options

High levels of satisfaction among PSEO participants and their parents have been confirmed by at least four different surveys, the most recent of which was conducted in 2001. Over 95% of the 1,658 on-campus program participants who responded to the 2001 survey conducted by the Center for School Change indicated that they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their PSEO program. Table 9 shows how students attending the program at various categories of post-secondary institutions rated their overall satisfaction level.

Table 8: Selected Area Learning Center student ratings of teachers

Location	better than my previous high school	about the same as my previous high school	worse than my previous high school	Blank
Rural 1	75%	21.4%	3.6%	
Rural 2	78.4%	21.6%		
Rural 3	76.9%	15.7%	3.7%	3.7%
Suburban 1	87.1%	12.9%		
Suburban 2	80.8%	9%	2.6%	7.7%
Urban	85%	12.5%	2.5%	

As part of this survey, participants attending state universities, community colleges or technical colleges were asked: "If you were to do it over again, would you chose to participate in the PSEO program?" Eighty-four percent of students attending state universities said "definitely yes" and 87% of those attending a community or technical college said the same. Less than 1% said they definitely would not choose to participate again.

Three other studies conducted in the 1990's also showed strong support for the PSEO program along with very high levels of satisfaction among both parents and students. "Seventy-three percent of students told us [the Office of the Legislative Auditor in 1996] that they were 'very satisfied' with the program and another 24% said they were 'somewhat satisfied.'" The Legislative Auditor also asked parents of participants if they would encourage their child to participate again. Ninety-five percent said "definitely" or "probably." (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 1996) A survey of 500 randomly selected participants conducted as part of a 1997 doctoral thesis found similar satisfaction ratings. A summary of the survey results states "over 97% of targeted students and parents rated the value of PSEO participation as 'excellent' or 'good.'"(Mullins, 1997) Finally, a 1990 survey of randomly selected participants found that student satisfaction with school increased from 63% to 89% after participation in PSEO. (Nathan& Jennings, 1990)

Charter schools

Two studies document the high marks given Minnesota charter schools by parents. A 1996 study found that "Almost all parents (90%) give the charter school their son or daughter attends a grade of A or B, while only 3% give the school a D or F." (Lange, et al, 1996) The authors compared these results to a national survey of parents conducted at the same time.

Table 9: PSEO participant satisfaction rates

	University of Minnesota	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
Very Satisfied	63.4% (130)	54.1% (119)	62.1% (738)	68.6% (24)	44.4% (4)	61.2% (1015)
Satisfied	29.8% (61)	42.3% (93)	33.4% (397)	25.7% (9)	22.2% (2)	33.9% (562)
In between	2.9% (6)	3.2% (7)	3.2% (38)	2.9% (1)	0	3.1% (52)
Dissatisfied	2% (4)	.5% (1)	.6% (7)	0	0	.7% (12)
Very Dissatisfied	.5% (1)	0	.1% (1)	0	0	.1% (2)

This survey found that only 65% of parents overall gave their child's school an A or B grade. The 1996 study also reports that 75% or more of parents reported being satisfied with the following aspects of the charter school their child attends:

- Teachers (89%)

- Home/school communication (88%)
- School's academic expectations (87%)
- Curriculum (87%)
- School administrators (78%)
- Student discipline (77%)
- Parent involvement (76%)

The same study also looked at charter student satisfaction. While their ratings were not quite as high as those of parents, a majority of students reported they were "happy" with their teachers, fellow students, schoolwork, school building, and communication. (Lange, et al. 1996)

A second study conducted in 1994 also surveyed charter school parents. Minnesota House Research, the authors of the report concluded that "parents felt that they got much of what they wanted from a charter school." The study summary goes on to say:

> Most frequently, parents cited some aspect of the school's curriculum as a source of satisfaction. Parents also reported satisfaction with the charter school teachers, smaller and longer classes, the school environment, and the effect the school was having on their children. (House Research, 1994)

These two studies are the only ones that look at parental satisfaction with charter schools across a number of schools. Of course, many individual schools assess satisfaction of parents and students on a regular basis, both formally and informally. Unfortunately this data is not comparable across schools and for the most part is not part of the public record.

Ultimately, a charter school's continued existence rests on satisfaction of students and parents. Parents and students choose a charter school and are likely to leave if they are not satisfied. Only a small number of charter schools have closed and several currently report waiting lists for enrollment.

As noted earlier, Minnesota charter school students disproportionately qualify for special education services. A University of Minnesota study looking at the impact of school choice options on disabled students found that parents of students with disabilities express satisfaction with the special services their students have received at a charter school. "Nearly three-quarters of parents with disabilities reported more satisfaction with the special education services provided at the charter school." (Ysseldyke& Lange, 1998)

Theme Five:

Preliminary studies suggest positive academic outcomes for students involved in various options, but more systemic research is needed

Are students making greater academic gains as result of having more choices? Existing data on student performance suggests that students are making academic progress in choice programs. Much of this data, however, relies on self-reports of achievement. Little research based on test scores, grade-point averages or other quantitative measures of achievement has been conducted. Although advocates for school choice have advanced the notion that competition in the form of public school choice programs will improve the overall public education system, it is not clear how much impact choice programs have had on overall academic achievement for students not specifically enrolled in a choice program.

Open Enrollment

Students involved early on in open enrollment did do better academically, according to a survey of parents. In fact, 95% of parents surveyed in a 1992 U.S. Department of Education study (Rubenstein, et al. 1992) reported their child's performance in school had either stayed the same or improved, when compared to the child's previous school. Fifty-one percent of these parents reported improved academic achievement as a result of the change in schools facilitated by open enrollment. At least 60% of these same parents indicated that "participating students experienced improvements in their self-confidence and motivation levels." (Rubenstein, et. al 1992)

Again, students surveyed held similar views. Fifty-two percent of secondary students involved in the program said they were doing better academically. Only five percent reported doing worse than they had in their previous school. Students indicated that the most important change that they had experienced was learning more than they had in their previous school. Other benefits were also indicated by students. A sample of these is summarized in Table 10.

As this table shows, in some cases students in rural, urban and suburban settings perceived the benefits of their new school differently. Only one of these differences was statistically significant however. This was that "Urban students were far more likely than their suburban counterparts to say that they were learning more in their new school." (Rubenstein, et. al. 1992)

Table 10: Selected benefits of open enrollment by geographic region

Benefit	Urban	Suburb	Rural
I am learning more*	71%	57%	64%
My basic skills have improved	52%	39%	40%
I feel better about myself and my abilities	65%	63%	66%
I am more sure that I will finish high school	44%	37%	35%

Source: "Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option" US Department of Education, 1992

* Statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence level.

Alternative Learning Centers, Alternative Schools and Private Contract Alternative Schools

Once again, available self-report data are clear. Students in alternative schools overwhelmingly indicate improved academic performance. A survey of students in five representative Area Learning Centers

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(see appendix for more information on how schools were selected) conducted by the Center for School Change in 2001 indicates between 70 and 90% (depending on location) of students surveyed reported better academic performance than in their previous high school. It is important to note that while a majority of students at all five ALCs included in the study reported improved achievement, the percentages did vary depending upon which school the students attended. (See full tables of survey results in the appendix)

The same students also reported more interest in schoolwork than in their previous high school and higher aspiration levels for life after high school. Between 51 and 80 percent (depending on location) of the students who responded to the survey said they were more interested in schoolwork than in their previous school. Table 11 illustrates the changes in aspiration levels for students before and after enrollment in and an ALC. For example, the number of students planning to graduate and attend a four-year college more than doubled at four out of five of the schools included in the study. Most dramatically, the percentage of students that didn't think they would graduate dropped precipitously in the five ALCs. For example, 42% of students enrolled in a suburban ALC thought they wouldn't graduate before coming to the ALC. After involvement with the ALC this number dropped to just over 2%.

These data are consistent with the findings of a 1990 study conducted by the Center for School Change. Again, in this study, ALC students were asked about their academic success. The random sample of students from Area Learning Centers, alternative schools and private contract alternative schools surveyed said they were doing better. Eight-four percent of ALC students, 86% of alternative school students and 73% of private alternative school students reported more academic success than in their previous school. (Nathan& Jennings, 1990) This study also showed dramatic increases in aspiration levels for students enrolled

Table 11: Aspiration levels of students before attending an ALC and after

Location	I planned to graduate and attend a community college		I planned to graduate and attend a vocational school		I planned to graduate and attend a 4 year college or university	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Rural 1	14.3% (4)	32.1% (9)	7.1% (2)	7.1% (2)	7.1% (2)	25% (7)
Rural 2	13.7% (7)	29.4% (15)	7.8% (4)	17.6% (9)	7.8% (4)	19.6% (10)
Rural 3	18.5% (20)	29.6% (32)	3.7% (4)	7.4% (8)	15.7% (17)	28.7% (31)
Suburban 1	12.9% (4)	32.3% (10)	6.5% (2)	16.1% (5)	12.9% (4)	25.8% (8)
Suburban 2	7.7% (6)	29.5% (23)	3.8% (3)	12.8% (10)	15.4% (12)	25.6% (20)
Urban	7.5% (3)	20% (8)	0 (0)	7.5% (3)	30% (12)	37.5% (15)

Location	I planned to graduate and get a job after high school		I didn't think I would graduate from high school		Not sure	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Rural 1	17.9% (5)	21.4% (6)	21.4% (6)	0	32.1% (9)	10.7% (3)
Rural 2	21.6% (11)	21.6% (11)	21.6% (11)	0	23.5% (12)	7.8% (4)
Rural 3	9.3% (10)	17.6% (19)	28.7% (31)	2.8% (3)	21.3% (23)	11.1% (12)
Suburban 1	12.9% (4)	12.9% (4)	16.1% (5)	6.5% (2)	32.2% (10)	6.5% (2)
Suburban 2	9% (7)	15.4% (12)	42.3% (33)	2.6% (2)	12.8% (10)	5.1% (4)
Urban	10% (4)	15% (6)	27.5% (11)	2.5% (1)	25% (10)	17.5% (7)

in all three types of alternative programs.

Two studies of students involved in schools that are part of the Minneapolis Federation of Alternative Schools show the difficulty of making sweeping statements and firm conclusions. There are some similarities between Federation and Minneapolis District Public schools. Both Federation and District high schools enroll high percentages of students of color and students from low-income families (well more than 50% in both cases, although Federation schools appear to enroll a somewhat higher percentage of students in both categories.) Federation schools enroll 84% students of color, and the district secondary schools enroll 69% students of color. Seventy-six percent of Federation students come from low-income families, compared with 57% of Minneapolis high school students (Minneapolis Student Accounting).

The Federation of Alternative Schools includes 21 schools that serve students with whom traditional secondary schools have not succeeded. So, their population is not a true cross section of students who enroll in Minneapolis secondary public schools. The first study shows that between February 2001 and February 2002, continuously enrolled Federation students who originally failed Minnesota's statewide mathematics and reading tests made more progress than did continuously enrolled district students. A continuously enrolled student is defined as any student who is at the

same school for two testing cycles and thus takes the same test twice.

Continuously enrolled Federation students who failed the math test improved from a scale score of 554 to 574, an increase of 20 points. Continuously enrolled district students who originally failed the mathematics test improved from a scale score of 553 to 566, an increase of 13 points. (Minneapolis Public Schools, 2002 A)

Continuously enrolled Federation students who failed the state's reading test improved from 559 to 582 (an increase of 23 points) while continuously enrolled district students who originally failed the test improved form 555 to 575 (an increase of 20 points). However, these improvements still left the average student who failed when taking the test the first time, whether in a federation or a district school, below the point they need to be at in order to pass the test.

The second study examined the amount of progress students in district and Federation schools made on the Northwest Achievement Levels Test (NALT), a standardized test given to students each spring. Fifty-four percent of Minneapolis district students made at least one year's worth of progress during the 2000-2001 school year on the reading test, and 60%of the district's students made at least one year's worth of progress in mathematics. Students at the vast majority of Federation schools did not make as much progress on these tests as their district counterparts. Again, the percentages of students making a year's worth of progress varied widely (Minneapolis, 2000-2001), suggesting that some schools may have important lessons to teach others.

While most of the data available rely on self-reports, one study conducted by the University of Minnesota in 1999 used a variety of assessment methods (including, but not limited to, standardized tests) to look at achievement levels of the "at-risk" students these programs are designed to address. This study found a statistically significant increase in reading achievement over the course of one academic year for students enrolled in three representative alternative schools. The study authors also concluded "in addition to the significant positive change in the area of reading, an upward trend is evident in academic areas of math and writing, responsibility, and contribution and citizenship." (Lange & Lehr 1999, p. 188)

Data about student achievement in Minnesota's alternative schools is sketchy and mixed. It is one area among many where more research and oversight is needed. In addition to better information about how students are faring academically, more information is needed on student retention. It appears that some alternative schools are having considerable difficulty retaining students.

Figures cited earlier show that the more than 100,000 students participating in alternative schools during the 2000-2001 school year translate into less than 25,000 full time equivalent students. (DCFL, 2002) The rapid increase in part-time,

part-year use of these programs deviates significantly from the original intention of this law. Students at some "second chance" schools appear to enroll briefly and then leave. According to the Department of Children, Families and Learning's Glory Kibbel, at some schools, movement of students in and out of these schools "is almost like a revolving door." Other schools are much better at retaining their students. Perhaps this revolving door use of alternative schools is appropriate and effective, but available information is currently inadequate to make any conclusions. It is also unclear what elements of these programs work to keep students at risk of dropping out in school and result in academic progress for these students.

Another issue involves supervision of the alternative schools. During the last few years, two scandals have erupted regarding schools that had contracts with metropolitan area school districts. In both of the alternative school mismanagement cases, thousands of dollars were committed to entrepreneurs who approached school districts and received contracts to create "Second Chance" schools. However, these entrepreneurs made serious mistakes regarding business operations. As one *Minneapolis Star Tribune* headline explained, "The Demise of a School" cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars, and deeply disappointed many families. (Shah, 2002)

In another case, Minnesota's attorney general required that an alternative school operator who contracted with the St. Paul and Bloomington School districts pay a $5,000 fine, and repay the program he directed $132,000 for "excess salary" and another $9,000 for excess rent. According to the article, this settlement occurred after the operator acknowledged that he operated without an independent board of directors, as required by state law, and paid himself $191,500 to run a non profit alternative during one year, and $156,400 the year before (these sums are substantially more than the St. Paul superintendent of schools was earning at the time). As the reporter covering the case noted, [the director's] "control over the Community Learning Project school and immigrant tutoring programs illustrates how publicly funded alternative education can operate for years with little or no government oversight or accountability for its finances." (Doyle, 2001) One of these schools has closed and the other (which had to repay money) lost its contracts with school districts. In both cases a careful review of the contract and of the schools finances may have prevented such problems.

Post-secondary Enrollment Options

The PSEO program demonstrates that improvements in academic achievement can be realized across the entire spectrum of students as a result of choice options. These programs not only benefit those students who are having difficulty in a traditional school setting, but can also result in more students, even those viewed as "high achievers," realize their full potential. Ann is one of these students -- a strong student in a suburban high school. She enrolled in one course during her junior year to see how well she would do in college. In what would have been her senior year, she was admitted and enrolled full-time in the University of Minnesota's Institute of Technology. She went on to complete her bachelor's degree, with honors, at the age of 20. (Nathan & Ysseldyke, 1994)

Students responding to the Center for School Change's 2001 survey of PSEO program participants, for example, said they were:

- Learning more than in high school (78% of survey respondents)
- Being challenged more than in high school (75% of survey respondents)
- Feeling more academically prepared for college (80% of survey respondents)

Not all students enroll for the academic rigor, however. Some enroll to save money and others to experience a different environment. In 1996, some high school principals noted that some students were taking remedial courses at colleges and universities. They said that more challenging courses were available in their high schools. PSEO advocates pointed out that sometimes high schools did not offer the kind of remedial courses available at colleges. Moreover, high school students testified that they often felt treated more like adults at colleges than at high schools. Nevertheless, the legislature amended PSEO in 1996, believing it was not appropriate for high school students to take remedial courses via this law.

Charter Schools

Based on state tests, how are charter schools doing in terms of academic achievement, individually, overall, and as compared to other public schools? Not surprisingly, the answers vary and conclusions cannot be definitive. Each charter school is responsible for demonstrating improved student achievement over the period of their contract or be closed. A number of studies have been done of student achievement as part of this contract renewal process at individual charter schools. In most cases, these studies have been conducted by evaluators such as Mary Ellen Murphy, Cheryl Lange, Stella Cheung and Lyelle Palmer, and most show improving achievement. As was originally proposed by charter advocates, several sponsors terminated contracts for charter schools that were not improving student achievement. (i.e., Right Step, Dakota Open, Prairie Island Charter)

Table 12: Public School Student Demographics 2001 - Charter and Non-Charter
(Based on students taking Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments*)

Grade Level	% Free and Reduced Lunch		% Minority Students		% New Students		% Special Education		% LEP Students	
	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter	Charter	Non-Charter
3rd	63%	30%	61%	18%	43%	10%	11%	11%	19%	6%
5th	52%	28%	46%	17%	37%	9%	19%	13%	8%	6%
8th	41%	24%	28%	15%	36%	8%	20%	12%	3%	4%
10th	45%	20%	35%	15%	73%	8%	18%	11%	4%	4%

Based on information from Minnesota's 8th and 10th grade statewide tests, some conclusions seem justified. (Office of Educational Accountability)

- Charter schools, on average, enroll a substantially different population of students than do district public schools, according to the state's 2001 Education Yearbook. At the 5th, 8th and 10th grade levels, charter schools, on a percentage basis, on average, enroll almost twice as many low-income students as district public schools, and almost twice as many students with some form of disability. At the third grade level, charter schools enroll, on a percentage basis, double the percentage of students from low-income families, and triple the percentage of limited English speaking students.

- District public school passing rates on statewide reading, writing and mathematics tests are higher than those of charter public school students. But this gap is closing. (see Table 13) Again, multiple interpretations are possible for this fact. It may be that charters are doing a better job as they gain more experience. It may be that the demographics of charters are changing. And there could be other explanations.

- Charter school passing rates on statewide 8th and 10th grade tests between 1998 and 2001 increased at a faster rate than did district public school (see Table 13)

- Through various approaches, some urban charter schools have been able to produce significantly higher achievement than not only

Table 13: Percentage of Charter and Non-charter School Students Passing the Basic Standards Tests.

	8th Grade Reading		8th Grade Math		10th Grade Writing	
	1998	2001	1998	2001	1998	2001
Charter	43%	70%	40%	56%	59%	79%
Non-Charter	68%	79%	71%	72%	85%	92%

Source : Minnesota Education Yearbook, 2001. Office of Educational Accountability, University of Minnesota, p. 63)

other urban public schools, but in some cases, suburban public schools. These schools include Higher Ground Academy in Minneapolis with an 87% poverty rate and a 73% pass rate on the state basic skills reading test, and Twin Cities Academy in St. Paul where 88% of the students passed both the state reading and math tests in 2001 (Minneapolis Star Tribune, 2002)

- Results of 2001-02 10th grade state writing tests show even more progress among metro area charters that in several cases out-scored district schools. Statewide, 91% of 10th grade students passed. In Minneapolis, 71% of students passed. Pass rates for Minneapolis charter schools varied from 76% to 71%. In St. Paul, 74% passed. St Paul charter rates varied from 87% to 35%. In the suburb of Stillwater, with 5% low-income students at the high school, 96% of the students passed. In New Heights, the only charter in Stillwater, 95% of the students passed (and 32% come from low income families). Statewide, charter school passing rates varied from 95% to 0%.

Scores on standardized tests are just one measure, among many, of student success. According to a majority of charter school parents, students are making progress in several areas. In a 1996 survey, a majority of charter school parents reported that their child had improved in the following areas: academic performance, motivation for learning, confidence in abilities, satisfaction with her or his own learning, sense of responsibility, satisfaction with teachers, relationships with friends, and time spent studying. (Lange, et. al, 1996)

Theme Six:

The consequences for the public school system, as a result of school choice initiatives, do not match the early negative predictions made by many educational organizations.

This section compares several concerns raised by opponents of Minnesota public school choice programs with the actual experience of these programs since 1985. Readers will have to draw their own conclusions. In general, it appears that the predictions made by opponents have not been born out.

Prediction One: (Open enrollment) "could destroy our programs for educating the handicapped." (Minnesota Education Association, 1985)

Dr. James Ysseldyke, Associate Dean, College of Education, University of Minnesota and former director of the federally funded National Center on Education Outcomes for Students with Disabilities, told an author of this report that:
"We ran 6 or 7 studies on various Minnesota public school choice programs. In general, we found they had many benefits for students. I would not agree with the assertion that open enrollment and other public school choice programs have been bad for students with disabilities. We didn't see any negative results. We found that there were fewer behavior problems from some students who transferred from large high school schools into small." (Ysseldyke, 2002)

Sue Abderholden, a long time advocate for children with disabilities and Director of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, based in Minneapolis, responded, "that is a surprising thing to say. Some families have used open enrollment to find better services for their children with disabilities. (Abderholden, 2002)

Renelle Nelson, Coordinator for Emotional Behavior Center, PACER Center, stated that, "In some cases, students were not identified as having a disability until they moved to a new school. I don't encourage parents to ask for open enrollment if they are experiencing difficulties. I encourage them to try to work things out in their own district. However, I've worked with many families whose students have done better after moving into an alternative school or area learning center schools. But these alternatives are not necessarily a panacea." (Nelson 2002)

Prediction Two: The charter proposal "risks creating elite academies for the few and second rate schools for the many – a multi-tiered system of public education with no guarantee of equity in facilities or curriculum." (Minnesota Education Association, 1991)

As noted earlier, Minnesota charter school students do not appear to

represent "an elite." In comparing the average Minnesota charter school with the average district public school, we find that the charter school has a higher percentage of low-income students, a higher percentage of students of color, and a higher percentage of students who have some form of disability.

As for facilities, the vast majority of charter schools are not in buildings that observers would describe as new or elite. These include many buildings that either public or private schools used and left for newer facilities. Some charters share space with another organization, such as a City Recreation Center or a social service agency. It is not reasonable to argue that charter buildings are, on average, better than district facilities.

Prediction Three: The Minnesota Education Association predicted that districts "would use their football teams and cheerleaders to sell students on coming to their school." (MEA, 1985)

While it's not clear whether students have been involved, there have been persistent concerns that some coaches have encouraged students to transfer from one school to another under open enrollment to improve sports teams or other school groups.

After these concerns were raised for years, the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) voted in 2002 to "tighten rules for transfers of student athletes." This new rule allows students to continue to participate in athletics with no penalty so long as they don't transfer more than once during their high school career (after initially selecting a high school to attend in 9th and 10th grade.) Students whose families actually move will be allowed to participate in sports with no penalty.

Part of the concern, according to Skip Peltier, MSHSL associate director, was that some (small number of students) were transferring from one school to another in the middle of the year. (Peltier, 2002) In fact, Peltier says that it was mid-year transfers that "triggered" the new rules. Under the new rules, adopted in 2002, such mid-year transfers would have to sit out for 50 percent of the varsity games during the regular season in their sport or sports for one calendar year.

However, such a mid year transfer was not permitted under open enrollment, which was something some families and schools did not appear to understand. Open enrollment permitted students to transfer from one district to another, without permission from the resident district only if the student applied by January 15 for the following school year.

The state high school league acknowledges that mid-year transfers are permitted only if both the sending and receiving district approve them. "The evidence that the MSHSL used to craft the new rules was mostly anecdotal, and though the number of students who abused the rule were far in the minority, there was enough evidence to support change, board members said." (Rand, p. A6)

League officials have not been keeping statistics on the number of student-athletes who transfer. This will begin in 2002.

Prediction Four: "Charter schools provide an open door to vouchers." (Minnesota Education Association, Spring, 1991)

Minnesota has not adopted voucher legislation, although it was proposed in the mid-1990's (by Governor Arne Carlson, a Governor who had strong MEA endorsement when he first ran for Governor). A handful of private non-sectarian schools have converted to charter schools with the understanding that they may not have admissions tests. It may be worth noting that both Minneapolis and St. Paul have some district-run schools that use admissions tests.

Prediction Five: "Charter schools...may turn out to be the biggest boondoggle since New Coke." (Bob Astrup, president of the Minnesota Education Association, 1986-94)

Since 1992, on a bi-partisan basis, the Minnesota legislature has

- increased the number of charters permitted from 8 to an unlimited number
- authorized several different organizations to sponsor charter schools
- allocated millions of dollars to help charter schools start up
- allocated millions of dollars to help charters pay costs of building leases

Editorials in both of the state's two largest newspapers, the Minneapolis based *Star Tribune* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press* have regularly praised the charter idea, and urged that it be expanded.

In 2000, the Harvard University/Ford Foundation "Innovations in American Government" program named Minnesota's charter law as one of America's best government innovations.

These actions suggest that a variety of people do not regard charters as a "boondoggle."

Prediction Six: Two officials of the Minnesota School Board Association commented on the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Act, shortly after it had been adopted.

Jean Olson, president of the Minnesota School Boards Association, wrote that "...students who remain in their high school setting will be negatively impacted by the loss of program opportunities resulting from a loss of aid." (Olson, 1986)

Citing the threat of layoffs, Robert Meeks, associate legislative director of he Minnesota School Board Association, was quoted in Education Week as calling the program "the most devastating piece of legislation in the past 20 or 30 years." (Wehrwein, 1985)

As noted earlier, after adoption of PSEO, school districts dramatically

increased the number of Advanced Placement courses (and in a few districts, the number of International Baccalaureate courses). Thus in many high schools, the number of advanced courses for which students could earn college credit if they did well actually increased after adoption of the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options program.

One group that has consistently opposed the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options program has been Minnesota's Secondary School Principals Association. However, in 1996 Minnesota's legislative auditor surveyed high school principals. As individuals, a majority of principals voiced a somewhat different view.

When presented with the statement: "Students generally have gained from their participation" in the PSEO program principals responded in the following manner:

13% Strongly Agree
46% Agree
21% Neither Agree nor Disagree
2% Disagree
11% Strongly Disagree
(Office of Legislative Auditor, p. 110)

Fifty-nine percent of the principals either agreed, or strongly agreed that students have gained from their participation in the program, compared with 13% who disagree, or strongly disagreed. Sixty-four percent thought the program increased communication with post-secondary institutions, compared with 1% who though it had decreased communication.

Principals were also asked whether the program was generally performing in a satisfactory manner. Their responses follow:

8% Strongly Agree
38% Agree
19% Neither Agree nor Disagree
21% Disagree
8% Strongly Disagree
(Office of Legislative Auditor, p. 110)

A plurality (46% - 29%) thought the program was performing in a satisfactory manner. While this shows that the program remains controversial, these figures surely don't add up to "the most devastating piece of legislation in the past 20 or 30 years."

Conclusions

Based on the findings reported under each of the six themes, we reached the following overarching conclusions.

- It appears that Minnesota's public school options are "here to stay." Minnesotans widely support statewide public school choice laws.
- There have been many benefits for participating students. Statewide choice options have also helped improve the overall

education system. Although major education groups strongly opposed Post-Secondary Enrollment Options, open enrollment and charter schools, almost none of their negative predictions have come to pass.

- There are some refinements that would probably help improve these programs. Public school choice remains a work in progress. However, we need to differentiate between refinements and restrictions. There are key differences. Some groups that originally opposed these options have urged, and are continuing to propose restrictions. We believe that refinements, not restrictions, are needed, but acknowledge that it is important to look carefully at several of these programs, assess them, and improve them.
- Minnesota leadership in public school choice has resulted in enormous national and even international attention. People from all over the United States, and even from other nations, have come to Minnesota to see what has been created here. Whether it's multi-million dollar grants from major national foundations to help replicate what Minnesotans have done, or a national award (and $100,000) for creating one of the most important state government innovations, the public school choice laws have attracted considerable positive attention for this state.
- Minnesota policy-makers of both parties, who in many cases encountered intense opposition when they proposed or supported these options, deserve great credit for their courage in giving these programs a chance.
- State policy leaders, including both the governor and state legislators, have a vital, continuing role in refining and improving public school choice programs.

Recommendations

Based on what the research tells us, we offer the following list of recommended actions. It is our hope that this project will lead to improved education for Minnesota's students. With that in mind, we offer these suggestions.

Minnesota's students should continue to have public school options. The four school choice programs should continue and be strengthened.

Large numbers of students appear to be benefiting directly from the options offered under these programs. The programs are offering important new opportunities not only for students and families, but also for educators.

Parents and students need more high quality information on all types of schools.

In order for public school choice to work, parents and students need good comparative information from which to make decisions. Currently the only such data available is in the form of standardized tests conducted by the state and some information about student demographics. While this type of information is valuable, it does not tell the whole story. At a minimum, this data needs to be presented in a format that allows parents and students to compare schools in equitable ways. In addition, much more information is needed about academic achievement and other important elements of school performance in both conventional public schools and choice options. While this report highlights the need for more information on how choice programs are faring, it is important to recognize that similar information is also not necessarily available for conventional public schools.

State policy-makers also need high quality information to make decisions about options programs.

Since public money is being used to support these options, we believe that it is not sufficient to allow students and parents to exclusively decide the fate of them by "voting with their feet." In our opinion, it is appropriate for policy-makers to hold all public schools accountable for improving student achievement. Unfortunately, the information necessary to do so in a responsible manner is currently incomplete at best, and virtually absent at worst. Finally, it is critical that these programs not be judged in a vacuum. These programs need to be compared in equitable ways to conventional schools.

Area Learning Centers and other alternatives: Much more information is needed, for example, about how students and school districts are making use of Area Learning Centers and other alternative schools. We strongly agree with Glory Kibbel, Program Specialist at the Department of Children, Families & Learning who says some alternative schools have a "revolving door," losing students almost as quickly as they gain them. And, as noted earlier, at least three districts have encountered serious problems with alternative school subcontracts in the last two years.

Moreover, some alternative school faculty and administrators have reported that districts are pushing students into their schools shortly before statewide testing programs. This means that student scores would be recorded as part of the alternative school record, rather than as a part of larger district schools. How

widespread is this practice? Policy-makers should know.

We urge that the state legislature conduct a careful study of the state's alternative schools. This should cover issues such as contracting procedures, district oversight, assignment policies, and student achievement. We believe this study should be focused on what is happening in alternative schools and how they can be improved.

Charter Schools: More information about charter schools may also be necessary to provide appropriate and necessary oversight, especially when it comes to the financial aspects of charter school operation. In some cases, there has not been adequate review of people proposing to create a charter school. Moreover, in some cases, there has not been adequate oversight of existing charter schools. We urge the Department of Children Families and Learning, in cooperation with appropriate community groups and charter school groups, to examine ways to increase the effectiveness of charter school sponsorship. Such a study also should examine funding patterns for charter schools relative to other public schools operating in the same district. The study could produce recommendations for changes in department policies and state law.

Post-secondary Enrollment Options: We believe that the state should look carefully at the role conventional school districts play in this program. Currently, a great deal of the responsibility and burden for handling paperwork and dissemination of information associated with the PSEO program falls to conventional high schools. This is perhaps like asking McDonald's to provide information about Burger King. This program will always require some degree of cooperation between students, high schools and post-secondary institutions, but the virtually exclusive reliance on high schools to share information may be ineffective, inappropriate and unwise.

Some research that we suggest above may need to be done by state organizations, such as the State Auditor or Department of Children, Families and Learning. But we also think that college students, as part of their masters or PhD programs, could be encouraged to carry out research providing information on these subjects. We identified only a handful of studies carried out by college students (i.e Mandala, Tenbusch, see reference section). We urge the Department of Children, Families and Learning, as well as state legislators, to explore possibilities of collaboration with graduate students and their professors. We believe that this collaboration could help the state gain valuable information at modest or no cost to taxpayers, while meeting graduate students' needs to do careful research as part of their programs.

Information on public school options should come from a neutral third party such as the state.

School districts cannot always be relied upon to provide adequate information about their competitors. This does not imply that some districts

aren't doing a good job of providing this type of information. For example, St. Paul holds an annual school choice fair at which conventional public schools, charter schools, and private schools have booths. It does, however, imply that it should not necessarily be the responsibility of a given district to present options other than its own. The appropriate method for dissemination of information may also vary by program. All high school freshmen, for example might be sent a letter by the state explaining the PSEO program and the process for becoming involved. The general population might be reached through public service announcements accompanied by web-based information and availability of printed material through an automated service.

Improvements in the overall public education system are more likely to be realized if options as well as conventional schools have more opportunities to share innovations that are working.

One of the positive outcomes expected from increased public school choice is an improvement in the overall public school system. The theory is that charter schools, Area Learning Centers and other alternative public schools are laboratories of innovation, where new approaches will be tried and conventional schools will learn from this experimentation. Another aspect of this theory holds that increased competition will lead conventional schools to adopt innovations to keep students.

As is often the case, the real world is more complicated than the theoretical one. We think it is fair to say that successful innovations are occurring in some charter schools, Area Learning Centers, alternative schools as well as in some conventional schools. Unfortunately, most schools and schools districts operate in relative isolation. While most of the struggles associated with educating students in the 21st century are shared with other schools, information about how to address them successfully is not shared often enough. Not enough use is made of what we already know and the wheel is continually reinvented, because current mechanisms for sharing information are either inadequate or non-existent.

The state should make a point of identifying those schools, *of all types*, that are making gains and share, through a variety of mechanisms, the successful approaches being used. The Minnesota Elementary Principals and the Minnesota School Boards Association have invited people from charter schools to make presentations at their conferences. The Center for

School Change has held several regional and statewide conferences, involving different kinds of public schools to promote transfer of information. We think more should be done, and hope some statewide education, parent and community organizations will be willing to do this as well, either as partners, or as a part of their own conferences.

Minnesota families have major statewide choices because governors and legislators were willing to provide leadership. Despite often intense opposition, legislators approved these laws.

Now it is time for policymakers to revisit these programs. While examining and refining them may again stir controversy, some changes are needed. Otherwise tax funds may not be well spent and students will suffer.

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Debra Hare is the Associate Director of the Center for School Change. She has authored or co-authored several research reports in the areas of teacher quantity and quality and charter schools. Before joining the Center, she worked for six years with the Minnesota State Senate as the Committee Administrator for the Education Committee and as a Legislative Assistant specializing on education issues. She holds an M.A. in Public/Non-profit Management from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.

Joe Nathan is the Director of the Center for School Change. He has been an award – winning public school teacher and administrator and coordinated the National Governor's Association education reform project "Time for Results." He has testified before 20 state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. He was elected president of the PTA at St. Paul's Horace Mann Elementary school, where all three of his children attended school. He regularly publishes commentaries in major US newspapers and has appeared on several hundred radio and television programs. Nathan has a B.A. from Carleton College and an M.A. and Ph.D. in educational administration from the University of Minnesota.

Appendix A
Methodology for Stakeholder Interviews

To assess how the various relevant stakeholder groups in Minnesota now view the four school choice options, fifty individuals associated with a range of organizations and stakeholder groups were interviewed, between May 2000 and May 2002, by the senior author, some on more than one occasion. Among the key groups represented were the state school boards association; the state school administrator organizations; the state teachers association; the state's rural education association; key legislators; key personnel in the state education department, including several former commissioners of education; administrators in the Minneapolis and St. Paul school systems; the state association of charter schools; charter school administrators; and education reform activists. The list of those interviewed is provided later in this appendix.

The interviews generally lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour, during which time respondents were asked, in succession about each of the four choice options, to comment on what they saw as (1) any positive and negative effects of each option, (2) any problems or issues that had arisen, (3) any change in opinion about the options over time, and (4) how school districts had responded to the options. Respondents were asked to give examples and point to evidence of any positive or negative effects they identified. The list of questions for the interviews is also presented in subsequent pages.

Individuals Interviewed as 'Stakeholders' for Study of Minnesota School Choice Options

Richard Anderson, Executive Director, Minnesota School Boards Association

Bob Astrup, President of the Minnesota Education Association, 1986-1994

Steve Dess, Executive Director, Minnesota Association of Charter Schools

David Dudycha, former Director of Policy & Planning, Minneapolis Public Schools

Representative Matt Entenza, Minnesota House of Representatives

Garnet Franklin, Professional Issues Specialist, Education Minnesota

Delores Fridge, Associate Vice Chancellor of the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Division of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System. Vice Chairman, Black Alliance for Educational Options.

Joe Graba, Senior Education Policy Fellow and former Dean of the Graduate School of Education, Hamline University

Vernae Hasbargen, Executive Director, Minnesota Rural Education Association.

Don Helmstetter, Superintendent, School District 16, Spring Lake Park; past president of the state association of school superintendents

Rose Hermodson, Director of Governmental Relations, Department of Children, Families, & Learning

Elizabeth Hinz, Planning Director, Minneapolis Public Schools

Wayne Jennings, Chairman, Designs for Learning. Alternative school advocate

Dale Jensen, former Executive Director, Minnesota Association of School Administrators

Ember Reichgott Junge, Attorney, former Senator, and author of the Minnesota Charter School Law in 1991

Ted Kolderie, Senior Fellow, Center for Policy Studies, Hamline University. Educational reformer and charter school advocate, St. Paul, MN

Charles Kyte, Executive Director, Minnesota Association of School Administrators

Dan Loewenson, retired Assistant to the Superintendent, Minneapolis Public Schools

Dan Loritz, Hamline University; Governor Perpich's education advisor

Gene Mamminga, Commissioner of Education under Governor Carlson

Bill Marx, Chief Fiscal Analyst, Minnesota House of Representatives

Tim Mazzoni, Professor emeritus, University of Minnesota. Expert on the history of Minnesota education policy.

Bob Meeks, Governmental Relations, Minnesota School Boards Association

Jessie Montano, Assistant Commissioner, Department of Children, Families, & Learning

Van Mueller, Professor emeritus, University of Minnesota

Tom Nelson, Superintendent of Independent School District 877, Buffalo, MN; former State Senator and former State Commissioner of Education

Lloyd Nielson, former Superintendent of Rosewood School District; former president of the American Association of School Administrators

Mitch Pearlstein, President of the Center of the American Experiment, Minneapolis, MN

Kent Pekel, Central Office Administrator, St. Paul Schools

Sandra Peterson, former co-president and now vice-president, Education Minnesota

Albert Quie, Governor of Minnesota, 1979-1983.

Judy Schaubach, co-president, Education Minnesota

Jon Schroeder, Charter Friends National Network, St. Paul, MN

Representative Alice Seagren, Minnesota House of Representatives

Katy Shea, Finance & Management, Department of Children, Families & Learning

Mark Sinclair, Learner Options, Department of Children, Families, & Learning

Daniel Stewart, Senior Fellow for Education Policy, Center of the American Experiment, Minneapolis, MN

Barry Sullivan, Governmental Relations, Department of Children, Families, & Learning

Nealcheng X. Thao, Member of St. Paul School Board

Dee Thomas, Principal, Minnesota New Country School, Henderson, MN

Douglas Thomas, Director, Gates-EdVisions Project, EdVisions Cooperative, Henderson, MN

Tess Tiernan, Principal, Skills for Tomorrow Charter School

Craig Vana, Executive Director for Special Initiatives for Technical Education, Minneapolis Public Schools

Lee Warne, President of Minnesota Rural Education Association

Bob Wedl, Executive Director for Policy & Planning, Minneapolis Public Schools; former State Commissioner of Education

Larry Wicks, Executive Director, Education Minnesota

Lee Pao Xiong, President & CEO, The Urban Coalition, St. Paul, Minnesota

James Ysseldyke, Professor and Associate Dean, University of Minnesota

Marti Zins, former president of Minnesota Education Association

Stakeholder Interview Questionnaire

Purpose of the Study:

As the state that has pioneered school choice measures, Minnesota now has the longest experience with a variety of these initiatives. As with all significant changes in public education, these measures have elicited not only high expectations, but extensive controversy, skepticism, and predictions of dire consequences. Thus, after more than ten years with most of the measures, and nearly thirty years with alternative schools, it is appropriate now to assess how these measures have worked out in practice. What beneficial or negative effects have they produced for education in Minnesota, and how do these effects square with the high expectations as well as the dire predictions made at the outset?

To answer this question, we will be interviewing a broad sample of representatives of the various stakeholder groups in Minnesota interested in education. Beyond surveying their views on this topic, we will look for empirical evidence that either supports or challenges the current perceptions or contentions of the various principal stakeholder groups.

Name of interviewee: **Date:**

Title & Address: **Phone & email info:**

Questions

Because of the variety of choice initiatives in Minnesota, it's necessary to discuss each of them separately. Let's begin with the post-secondary option.

1) What do you see as the positive effects, if any, of the post-secondary option?
   a) What evidence of these positive effects can you point to?
2) What do you see as the negative effects, if any, of the post-secondary option?
   a) What evidence of these negative effects can you point to?
3) Are there problems or issues about the post-secondary option that should be discussed, apart from its positive or negative effects?
   a) If so, what are they?
4) Do you think opinions about the post-secondary option have changed over time?
   a) If so, whose opinions have changed in what way?
5) What have the public schools done in response to the post-secondary option?
   a) Have ideas about how the public schools should respond changed over time?

Let's turn now to the open-enrollment option:

6) What do you see as the positive effects, if any, of the open-enrollment option?
   a) What evidence of these positive effects can you point to?
7) What do you see as the negative effects, if any, of the open-enrollment option?
   a) What evidence of these negative effects can you point to?
8) Are there problems or issues about the open-enrollment option that should be discussed, apart from its positive or negative effects?
   a) If so, what are they?

9) Do you think opinions about the open-enrollment option have changed over time?
   a) If so, whose opinions have changed in what way?

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10) What have the public schools done in response to the open-enrollment option?
    a) Have ideas about how the public schools should respond changed over time?

Next, let's turn to the charter schools:

11) What do you see as the positive effects, if any, of the charter schools?
    a) What evidence of these positive effects can you point to?
12) What do you see as the negative effects, if any, of the charter schools?
    a) What evidence of these negative effects can you point to?
13) Are there problems or issues about the charter schools that should be discussed, apart from their positive or negative effects?
    a) If so, what are they?
14) Do you think opinions about the charter schools have changed over time?
    a) If so, whose opinions have changed in what way?
15) What have the public schools done in response to the charter schools?
    a) Have ideas about how the public schools should respond changed over time?

Finally, lets talk about the alternative schools and the "second chance" initiative:

16) What do you see as the positive effects, if any, of the "second chance" programs?
    a) What evidence of these positive effects can you point to?
17) What do you see as the negative effects, if any, of the "second chance" programs?
    a) What evidence of these negative effects can you point to?
18) Are there problems or issues about the "second chance" programs that should be discussed, apart from their positive or negative effects?
    a) If so, what are they?
19) Do you think opinions about the "second chance" programs have changed over time?
    a) If so, whose opinions have changed in what way?
20) What have the public schools done in response to the "second chance" programs?
    a) Have ideas about how the public schools should respond changed over time?

In conclusion, are there any important issues or questions that should be considered that I haven't asked about?

Thank you so much for your time and willingness to be interviewed for this study!!

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Appendix B
Survey Methodology

Post-secondary Enrollment Options Survey

In the spring and summer of 2001 the Center for School Change surveyed students participating in the PSEO program. Students who participated in the program at the University of Minnesota were sent an electronic survey and a cover letter by e-mail. Participants attending all other post-secondary institutions were sent a hard copy letter and survey to their home address in early July, 2001. Participant information for University of Minnesota participants was received from the University of Minnesota. Participant information for all others was received from the Department of Children, Families & Learning. We did not survey students who participate in PSEO programs off-campus.

A total of 7,117 participants from all types of institutions received the survey. Of these 1,658 participants responded to the survey. Assuming that these responses were random, we are 95% confident that the responses are an accurate representation of all participants' attitudes. Because many students have attended more than one type of post-secondary institution under the program, it is difficult to determine the exact percentage of students attending a particular type of institution (University of Minnesota, state universities, community colleges, technical colleges, and private colleges) that responded. We do report survey responses by type of institution attended, but comparisons between these groups are not necessarily statistically significant. Survey respondents were asked to identify the institutions they attended and the number of credits completed. For purposes of breaking down participants by institution type, we used the institution that the student received the most credits from and coded that institution by type.

After distribution of the electronic survey to University of Minnesota students, the decision was made to add one additional question to the survey. This question asks students whether or not they would chose to participate in the program if they had to do it over again. Data for this question is reported for students attending all institutions other than the University of Minnesota.

Area Learning Center Survey

Seventeen Area Learning Centers (ALCs) representing the various geographic regions of the state (urban, suburban and rural) were selected to participate in the study. Each school distributed surveys to students and teachers and results were mailed back to the Center for School Change. Response rates at a majority of the schools were low. At 5 ALCs located across the geographic locations, more than half of the

students responded to the survey. The results from these five schools are presented in this report. The response rate for teachers was very low. So, ALC teacher data is not presented in this report.

The ALC's who agreed to be part of this study were promised that data about an individual school would not be presented in such as manner as to reveal the identity of the school. Under this agreement, data would be presented in aggregate or in a confidential manner. Since the results do vary somewhat from school to school, it seems inappropriate to present the data only in aggregate form. The data is presented by school, with no names or numbers attached, for this reason.

The following two appendices present the full results of each of these surveys.

Appendix C
PSEO Survey Summary

Percent of Students Receiving an A or B in 75-100% of their classes

UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
58.5% (120)	65.9% (145)	62.9% (748)	60% (21)	44.4% (4)	

When did you enroll in the PSEO Program?

	UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
11th and 12th grade	38.5% (79)	27.7% (61)	33.2% (395)	25.7% (9)	22.2% (2)	32.9% (546)
12th grade only	53.2% (109)	60.5% (133)	55.6% (661)	48.6% (17)	33.3% (3)	55.7% (923)
11th grade only	6.8% (14)	10.9% (24)	10.3% (122)	22.9% (8)	11.1% (1)	10.2% (169)
Blank	1.5% (3)	1% (2)	.9% (11)	2.9% (1)	33.3% (3)	1.3% (20)

1. ***Why did you choose to enroll in the PSEO Program?***

	UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
To take courses not offered at my high school	75.5% (154)	54.5% (120)	59.3% (705)	51.4% (18)	11.1% (1)	60.2% (998)
To save money on future college costs	73.2% (150)	83.6% (184)	80.9% (962)	88.6% (31)	44.4% (4)	80.3% (1331)
To have more freedom	71.7% (147)	66.4% (146)	73.6% (875)	62.9% (22)	22.2% (2)	71.9% (1192)
To help decide whether or not to attend college after graduation	3.9% (8)	9.5% (21)	9.7% (115)	5.7% (2)	11.1% (1)	8.9% (147)
To be in a less restrictive learning environment	61.5% (126)	50.9% (112)	62.2% (740)	42.9% (15)	22.2% (2)	60% (995)
To follow the advice of my high school counselor/teacher	8.3% (17)	11.4% (25)	13.4% (159)	8.6% (3)	22.2% (2)	12.4% (206)
To follow the advice of my parents	19% (39)	26.4% (58)	30.5% (363)	31.4% (11)	44.4% (4)	28.6% (475)
To be with my friends	5.9% (12)	6.4% (14)	8.1% (96)	5.7% (2)	0 (0)	7.5% (124)
To be in a more adult environment	69.3% (142)	62.7% (138)	69% (820)	62.9% (22)	55.6% (5)	68% (1127)
Other (please explain):	25.4% (52)	19.5% (43)	18.8% (224)	14.3% (5)	11.1% (1)	19.6% (325)

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3. ***Why did you choose your particular PSEO institution?***

	UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
The course offerings suited my interests and goals	67.8% (139)	38.6% (85)	41.1% (489)	57.1% (20)	33.3% (3)	44.4% (736)
It was close to my home or high school	59% (121)	71.8% (158)	78.4% (932)	54.3% (19)	33.3% (3)	74.4% (1233)
It was the only school I could attend because of transportation restrictions	7.8% (16)	22.3% (49)	20.4% (242)	5.7% (2)	11.1% (1)	18.7% (310)
It was the only school in my geographic area	1.5% (3)	10% (22)	15.6% (185)	0 (0)	11.1% (1)	12.7% (211)
The school has a good reputation	63.4% (130)	29.1% (64)	29.2% (347)	62.9% (22)	11.1% (1)	34% (564)
My friends were attending this school	17.1% (35)	11.8% (26)	18.3% (217)	14.3% (5)	0 (0)	17.1% (283)
I might want to attend this school after high school graduation	52.2% (107)	39.5% (87)	23.8% (283)	40% (14)	11.1% (1)	29.7% (492)
I missed the deadline for other schools	0 (0)	1.8% (4)	5% (60)	5.7% (2)	0 (0)	4% (66)
Other (please explain):	13.2% (27)	10.5% (23)	7.7% (91)	25.7% (9)	22.2% (2)	9.2% (152)

4. ***What benefits (if any) do you see yourself gaining from your PSEO participation?***

	UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
Learning more than in high school	83.9% (172)	78.2% (172)	76.9% (914)	80% (28)	44.4% (4)	77.8% (1290)
Being challenged more than in high school	85.9% (176)	80.9% (178)	72.5% (862)	77.1% (27)	44.4% (4)	75.2% (1247)
Feeling more academically prepared for college	84.9% (174)	81.8% (180)	78.3% (931)	82.9% (29)	55.6% (5)	79.6% (1319)
Saving time because getting high school and college credit at the same time	80% (164)	84.1% (185)	84.9% (1009)	85.7% (30)	55.6% (5)	84% (1393)
Knowing what to expect in a college environment	81.5% (167)	76.4% (168)	77.7% (924)	80% (28)	55.6% (5)	77.9% (1292)
Feeling more directed towards a specific academic/career interest	46.8% (96)	41.8% (92)	37.1% (441)	48.6% (17)	44.4% (4)	39.2% (650)
Saving money because tuition was free	83.4% (171)	86.4% (190)	87.1% (1036)	80% (28)	44.4% (4)	86.2% (1429)
Feeling more confident in own academic abilities	55.1% (113)	56.8% (125)	54.2% (644)	68.6% (24)	44.4% (4)	54.9% (910)
None	1% (2)	.5% (1)	.3% (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	.4% (6)
Other (please explain):	5.9% (12)	3.6% (8)	3% (36)	5.7% (2)	11.1% (1)	3.6% (59)

5. ***Did you have any of the following problems (if any) did you experience while using the PSEO Program?***

	UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
Teachers/counselors at my high school were unsupportive or unhelpful	21.5% (44)	23.2% (51)	23% (273)	11.4% (4)	11.1% (1)	22.5% (373)
Instructors/staff at my PSEO were unsupportive or unhelpful	6.8% (14)	9.5% (21)	7.9% (94)	8.6% (3)	11.1% (1)	8% (133)
Not able to participate in sports, music or other extra-curricular activities	22.4% (46)	11.4% (25)	10% (119)	14.3% (5)	11.1% (1)	11.8% (196)
Transportation between my home/high school and my PSEO institution is difficult	23.9% (49)	14.1% (31)	10.3% (123)	14.3% (5)	11.1% (1)	12.6% (209)
Not able to enroll in the postsecondary classes that I wanted	18% (37)	35.5% (78)	13% (154)	11.4% (4)	0 (0)	16.5% (273)
Credits did not transfer from my postsecondary institution to my high school	2.4% (5)	2.7% (6)	2.6% (31)	5.7% (2)	0 (0)	2.7% (44)
Scheduling problems between my high school and postsecondary institution	20.5% (42)	22.3% (49)	18.3% (217)	20% (7)	0 (0)	19% (315)
Postsecondary classes were more difficult than I anticipated	8.8% (18)	7.7% (17)	7.7% (91)	5.7% (2)	11.1% (1)	7.8% (129)
Postsecondary classes were less challenging than I anticipated	12.7% (26)	20.5% (45)	13.2% (157)	11.4% (4)	0 (0)	14% (232)
None	17.1% (35)	18.2% (40)	28.2% (335)	34.3% (12)	33.3% (3)	25.6% (425)
Other (please explain):	9.8% (20)	5% (11)	5.6% (66)	11.4% (4)	0 (0)	6.1% (101)

6. ***What is your overall level of satisfaction with the PSEO Program?***

	UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
Very Satisfied	63.4% (130)	54.1% (119)	62.1% (738)	68.6% (24)	44.4% (4)	61.2% (1015)
Satisfied	29.8% (61)	42.3% (93)	33.4% (397)	25.7% (9)	22.2% (2)	33.9% (562)
In between	2.9% (6)	3.2% (7)	3.2% (38)	2.9% (1)	0	3.1% (52)
Dissatisfied	2% (4)	.5% (1)	.6% (7)	0	0	.7% (12)
Very Dissatisfied	.5% (1)	0	.1% (1)	0	0	.1% (2)
Blank	1.5% (3)	0	.7% (8)	2.9% (1)	33.3% (3)	.9% (15)

7. Did you intentionally avoid a class through PSEO enrollment?

17.6% Yes	82.4% No

If yes, why did you want to avoid the class?

10.3% (30)	It was too difficult
24.4% (71)	It was too easy
55.3% (161)	It would be a waste of time
41.9% (122)	The quality of instruction was poor
13.7% (40)	Disliked peers
18.9% (55)	Other (please explain):

8. With regard to your personal experience, what ways (if any) could the PSEO Program be improved?

	UofM	State University	Comm. College/Tech College	Private	Unknown or Other	All
Ensure that all credits will transfer between my PSEO institution and high school	20% (41)	19.1% (42)	24.3% (289)	17.1% (6)	11.1% (1)	22.9% (379)
More information about which credits may/ may not transfer to other colleges/ universities	44.9% (92)	42.3% (93)	52.6% (625)	54.3% (19)	44.4% (4)	50.2% (833)
Reducing scheduling conflicts between my PSEO institution and high school	17.1% (35)	22.7% (50)	23.8% (283)	17.1% (6)	11.1% (1)	22.6% (375)
Making transportation easier between my PSEO institution and high school	29.8% (61)	14.5% (32)	16.8% (200)	17.1% (6)	22.2% (2)	18.2% (301)
Better counseling system to support me at my PSEO institution	12.7% (26)	26.8% (59)	20.3% (241)	8.6% (3)	33.3% (3)	20% (332)
Better counseling system at my high school to help me as a PSEO participant	26.3% (54)	35.5% (78)	31.4% (373)	8.6% (3)	22.2% (2)	30.8% (510)
More information should be distributed to students about the PSEO Program	49.3% (101)	55.9% (123)	57.4% (683)	60% (21)	55.6% (5)	56.3% (933)
None	6.8% (14)	6.8% (15)	8.9% (106)	11.4% (4)	11.1% (1)	8.4% (140)
Other (please explain):	13.2% (27)	8.6% (19)	5.3% (63)	5.7% (2)	0 (0)	6.7% (111)

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9. If you were to do it over again, would you choose to participate in the PSEO Program?

	State University	Comm. College/Tech College
Definitely Yes	84.1% (185)	87.2% (1037)
Probably Yes	12.3% (27)	9.5% (113)
Not Certain	2.7% (6)	1.6% (19)
Probably Not	.5% (1)	.6% (7)
Definitely Not		.2% (2)
Blank	.5% (1)	.9% (11)

Appendix D
ALC Student Survey Summary Results

1. What is your age?

Age	Rural 1	Rural 2	Rural 3	Suburban 1	Suburban 2	Urban
Blank	3.6% (1)		3.8% (4)		1.3% (1)	
12						
13		2% (1)	1.9% (2)			
14		9.8% (5)	1.9% (2)			
15	17.9% (5)	17.6% (9)	18.5% (20)		3.8% (3)	
16	28.6% (8)	25.5% (13)	21.3% (23)	16.1% (5)	23.1% (18)	30% (12)
17	39.3% (11)	25.5% (13)	25.9% (28)	61.3% (19)	38.5% (30)	40% (16)
18	7.1% (2)	13.7% (7)	19.4% (21)	22.6% 97)	26.9% (21)	22.5% (9)
19		5.9% (3)	5.6% (6)		6.4% (5)	5% (2)
20			1.9% (2)			
21+	3.6% (1)					2.5% (1)

2. How long have you been at your present ALC?

	Rural 1	Rural 2	Rural 3	Suburban 1	Suburban 2	Urban
6 months or less	39.3% (11)	37.3% (19)	38.9% (42)	61.3% (19)	32.1% (25)	45% (18)
1 year	17.9% (5)	11.8% (6)	31.5% (34)	6.5% (2)	14.1% (11)	25% (10)
1 ½ years	7.1% (2)	23.5% (12)	12% (13)	16.1% (5)	20.5% (16)	17.5% (7)
2 years	17.9% (5)	13.7% (7)	8.3% (9)	9.7% (3)	20.5 % (16)	2.5% (1)
2 ½ years	3.6% (1)	7.8% (4)	2.8% (3)		3.8% (3)	2.5% (1)
3 years	10.7% (3)		3.7% (4)	6.5% (2)	6.4% (5)	5% (2)
3 ½ years		5.9% (3)	1.9% (2)		2.6% (2)	2.5% (1)
4 years	3.6% (1)		.9% (1)			
Blank						

*3. **What is your overall level of satisfaction with the Area Learning Center that you now attend?***

Location	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	In between	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Blank
Rural 1	17.9% (5)	50% (14)	17.9% (5)	10.7% (3)	3.6% (1)	
Rural 2	17.6% (9)	49% (25)	29.4% (15)	3.9% (2)		
Rural 3	22.2% (24)	44.4% (48)	16.7% (18)	9.3% (10)	5.6% (6)	1.9% (2)
Suburban 1	45.2% (14)	41.9% (13)	12.9% (4)			
Suburban 2	33.3% (26)	44.9% (35)	14.1% (11)	3.8% (3)	1.3% (1)	2.6% (2)
Urban	35% (14)	37.5% (15)	22.5% (9)		2.5% (1)	2.5% (1)

4. What is the reason that you enrolled in an Area Learning Center?
All that apply

Reason	Rural 1	Rural 2	Rural 3	Suburb 1	Suburb 2	Urban

To have a more individualized education	53.6% (15)	52.9% (27)	54.6% (59)	54.8% (17)	60.3% (47)	67.5% (27)
To be in a school with fewer students	46.4% (13)	58.3% (30)	58.3% (63)	45.2% (14)	60.3% (47)	72.5% (29)
I did not have a choice (court ordered or district ordered)	0	11.8% (6)	15.7% (17)	3.2% (1)	12.8% (10)	5% (2)
To be in a less restrictive learning environment	53.6% (15)	45.1% (23)	45.4% (49)	22.6% (7)	43.6% (34)	62.5% (25)
To follow the advice of my high school counselor/teacher	10.7% (3)	15.7% (8)	25.9% (28)	29% (9)	16.7% (13)	12.5% (5)
To follow the advice of my parents	7.1% (2)	13.7% (7)	18.5% (20)	12.9% (4)	14.1% (11)	10% (4)
To be with my friends	10.7% (3)	21.6% (11)	18.5% (20)	3.2% (1)	12.8% (10)	7.5% (3)
Expulsion from previous school	7.1% (2)	19.6% (10)	13% (14)	3.2% (1)	11.5% (9)	7.5% (3)
Credit make-up/I was behind credits	46.3% (13)	37.3% (19)	51.9% (56)	51.6% (16)	60.3% (47)	35% (14)
To have a more flexible school schedule	46.4% (13)	41.2% (21)	41.7% (45)	45.2% (14)	65.4% (51)	62.5% (25)

5. ***What benefits (if any) do you see yourself gaining from attending an Area Learning Center that you would not gain from your former high school?***
All that apply

Benefits	Rural 1	Rural 2	Rural 3	Suburb 1	Suburb 2	Urban
Learning more than in a traditional high school	35.7% (10)	23.5% (12)	41.7% (45)	38.7% (12)	39.7% (31)	57.5% (23)
Possibility for a more individualized education than in a traditional high school	14.3% (4)	9.8% (5)	9.3% (5)	6.5% (2)	9% (7)	12.5% (5)
More supportive teachers/ staff	42.9% (12)	54.9% (28)	57.4% (62)	74.2% (23)	73.1% (57)	77.5% (31)
Being challenged more than in a traditional high school	14.3% (4)	7.8% (4)	23.1% (25)	12.9% (4)	19.2% (15)	25% (10)
Receiving more personal attention from teachers/ staff with schoolwork	53.6% (15)	49% (25)	55.6% (60)	71% (22)	67.9% (53)	77.5% (31)
Receiving more personal attention from teachers/staff with personal problems	14.3% (4)	27.5% (14)	36.1% (39)	58.1% (18)	41% (32)	32.5% (13)
Receiving more personal attention from teachers/staff with career guidance	28.6% (8)	23.5% (12)	32.4% (35)	35.5% (11)	55.1%(43)	30% (12)
Feeling more directed towards a specific academic/career/vocational interest	35.7% (10)	19.6% (10)	28.7% (31)	19.4% (6)	33.3% (26)	42.5% (17)
Feeling more confident in own academic abilities	46.4% (13)	39.2% (20)	43.5% (47)	51.6% (16)	44.9% (35)	55% (22)
Shorter school days	46.4% (13)	51% (26)	35.2% (38)	74.2% (23)	62.8% (49)	15% (6)
Opportunities for unique educational experiences (f.ex. field trips, MAAPS)	7.1% (2)	29.4% (15)	37% (40)	35.5% (11)	26.9% (21)	50% (20)
Ability to have a job during non- school hours	35.7% (10)	39.2% (20)	39.8% (43)	54.8% (17)	61.5% (48)	20% (8)
To get away from negative friends	25% (7)	29.4% (15)	23.1% (25)	32.3% (10)	34.6% (27)	42.5% (17)
Didn't fit in at a traditional high school	39.3% (11)	21.6% (11)	29.6% (32)	25.8% (8)	39.7% (31)	47.5% (19)
Easier than high school courses	42.9% (12)	43.1% (22)	41.7% (45)	41.9% (13)	41% (32)	12.5% (5)
Don't have to do as much homework	57.1% (16)	62.7% (32)	44.4% (48)	38.7% (12)	52.6% (41)	22.5% (9)
Other (please explain):						

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***What do you think are the disadvantages (if any) of attending an Area Learning Center?* All that apply**

Reason	Rural 1	Rural 2	Rural 3	Suburb 1	Suburb 2	Urban
Not able to participate in sports, music programs, dances or other extra-curricular activities	28.6% (8)	27.5% (14)	27.8% (30)	38.7% (12)	43.6% (34)	30% (12)
Transportation to and from my ALC is difficult	32.1% (9)	11.8% (6)	12% (13)	3.2% (1)	26.9% (21)	32.5% (13)
Most of my friends attend my former school	21.4% (6)	35.3% (18)	34.3% (37)	54.8% (17)	34.6% (27)	22.5% (9)
Negative public opinion of ALCs	35.7% (10)	37.3% (19)	54.6% (59)	41.9% (13)	37.2% (29)	42.5% (17)
Negative impression from colleges and universities of ALCs	35.7% (10)	25.5% (13)	36.1% (39)	35.5% (11)	33.3% (26)	35% (14)
Class electives are missed because of small school size	17.9% (5)	25.5% (13)	21.3% (23)	22.6% (7)	38.5% (30)	15% (6)
Independent study is more difficult to complete than at a regular high school	3.6% (1)	7.8% (4)	10.2% (11)	19.4% (6)	14.1% (11)	12.5% (5)
Unmotivated students are a distraction	25% (7)	27.5% (14)	39.8% (43)	32.2% (10)	50% (39)	37.5%(15)

6. *How are your teachers at your ALC?*

Location	better than my previous high school	about the same as my previous high school	worse than my previous high school	Blank
Rural 1	75% (21)	21.4% (6)	3.6% (1)	
Rural 2	78.4% (40)	21.6% (6)		
Rural 3	76.9% (83)	15.7% (17)	3.7% (4)	3.7% (4)
Suburban 1	87.1% (27)	12.9% (4)		
Suburban 2	80.8% (63)	9% (7)	2.6% (2)	7.7% (6)
Urban	85% (34)	12.5% (5)	2.5% (1)	

7. *How interested are you in your schoolwork at your ALC?*

Location	more than my previous high school	about the same as my previous high school	less than my previous high school	Blank
Rural 1	78.6% (22)	21.4% (6)		
Rural 2	51% (26)	43.1% (22)	5.9% (3)	
Rural 3	67.6% (73)	21.3% (23)	7.4% (8)	3.7% (4)
Suburban 1	64.5% (20)	32.3% (10)	3.2% (1)	
Suburban 2	61.5% (48)	25.6% (20)	7.7% (6)	5.1% (4)
Urban	80% (32)	12.5% (5)	7.5% (3)	

8. How does your academic performance at your ALC compare with your academic performance at your previous high school?

Location	better than my previous high school	about the same as my previous high school	worse than my previous high school	Blank
Rural 1	82.1% (23)	17.9% (5)		
Rural 2	72.5% (37)	21.6% (11)	3.9% (2)	2% (1)
Rural 3	76.9% (83)	15.7% (17)	4.6% (5)	2.8% (3)
Suburban 1	90.3% (28)	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	
Suburban 2	76.9% (60)	16.7% (13)	1.3% (1)	5.1% (4)
Urban	70% (28)	22.5% (9)	7.5% (3)	

9. Before you came to your ALC, what were your future plans?

10. ***Now, what are your future plans?***

Location	I planned to graduate and attend a community college		I planned to graduate and attend a vocational school		I planned to graduate and attend a 4 year college or university	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Rural 1	14.3% (4)	32.1% (9)	7.1% (2)	7.1% (2)	7.1% (2)	25% (7)
Rural 2	13.7% (7)	29.4% (15)	7.8% (4)	17.6% (9)	7.8% (4)	19.6% (10)
Rural 3	18.5% (20)	29.6% (32)	3.7% (4)	7.4% (8)	15.7% (17)	28.7% (31)
Suburban 1	12.9% (4)	32.3% (10)	6.5% (2)	16.1% (5)	12.9% (4)	25.8% (8)
Suburban 2	7.7% (6)	29.5% (23)	3.8% (3)	12.8% (10)	15.4% (12)	25.6% (20)
Urban	7.5% (3)	20% (8)	0 (0)	7.5% (3)	30% (12)	37.5% (15)

Location	I planned to graduate and get a job after high school		I didn't think I would graduate from high school		Not sure	
	Before	Now	Before	Now	Before	Now
Rural 1	17.9% (5)	21.4% (6)	21.4% (6)	0	32.1% (9)	10.7% (3)
Rural 2	21.6% (11)	21.6% (11)	21.6% (11)	0	23.5% (12)	7.8% (4)
Rural 3	9.3% (10)	17.6% (19)	28.7% (31)	2.8% (3)	21.3% (23)	11.1% (12)
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